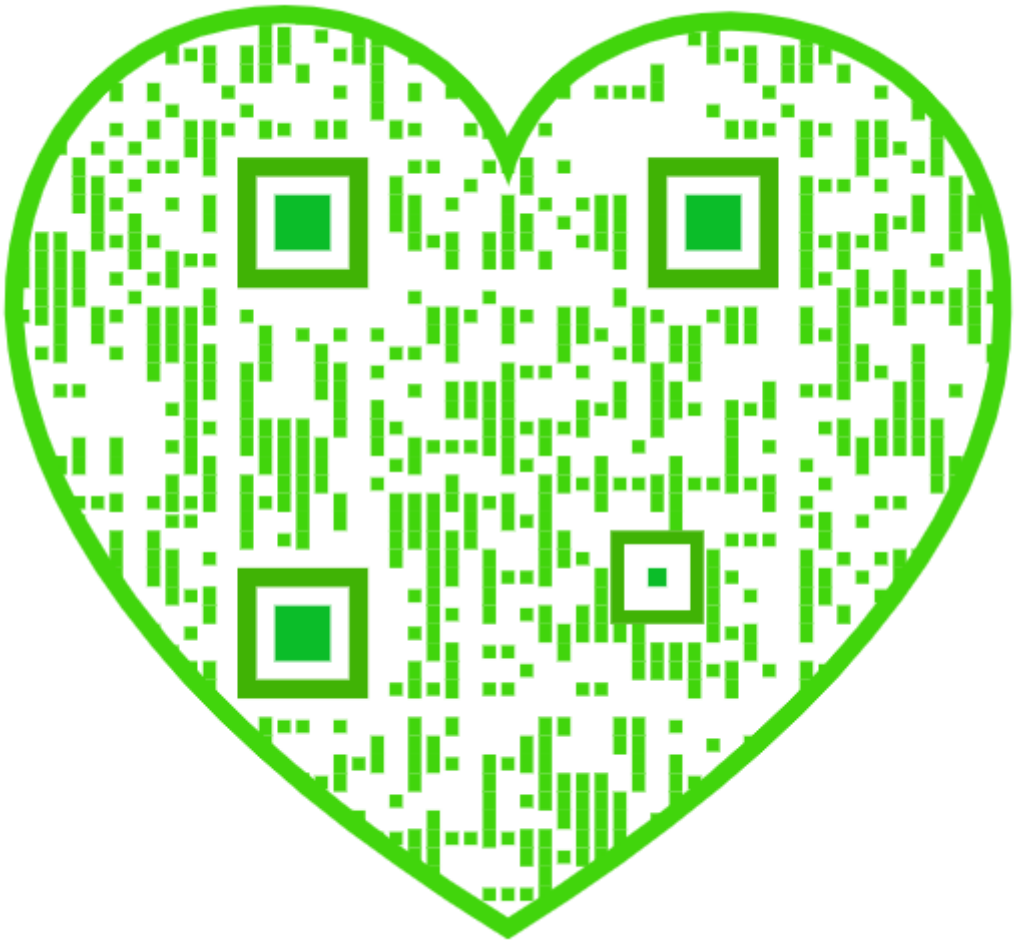

Roy Saved by the Light-ship's Men.

THE STEEL HORSE

OR

THE RAMBLES OF A BICYCLE

BY

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THE STEEL HORSE;

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CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I MAKE MY BOW.

"SCOTLAND'S a-burning! Look out, fellows! Put on the brakes, or you will be right on top of it the first thing you know."

"On top of what?"

"Why, can't you see? If it hadn't been for my lamp I should have taken the worst header anybody ever heard of. How some fellows can run around on their wheels after dark without a light, and take the chances of breaking their necks, beats my time. I wouldn't do it for any money."

"Great Scott! How do you suppose that pile of things came on the track?"

"It isn't a pile of things. It is a big rock which has rolled down from the bank above, and we have discovered it in time to prevent a terrible railroad disaster."

"The rains loosened it, probably."

"Well, what are we standing here for? Let's take hold, all hands, and roll it off before the train comes along."

"We can't roll it off. It's half as big as Rube Royall's cabin. It seems strange to me that it stopped so squarely in the middle of the track. I should think it ought to have gathered headway enough during its descent to roll clear across the roadbed, and down into the gulf on the other side."

The speakers were your old friends Joe Wayring and his two chums, Roy Sheldon and Arthur Hastings; and I am one of the Expert Columbias who were introduced to your notice in the concluding chapters of the second volume of this series of books. I have been urged by my companions to describe the interesting and exciting incidents that happened during

our vacation run from one end of the State to the other and back again, on which we set out just a week ago to-day. I have begun the task with many misgivings. This is my first appearance as a story-teller; but then my friends, Old Durability and the Canvas Canoe, labored under the same disadvantage. When I am through it will be for you to decide which one of us has interested you the most.

You will remember that when the Canvas Canoe's adventures were ended for the season and he was "laid up in ordinary" (by which I mean the recess in Joe Wayring's room), it was midwinter. The ponds and lakes were frozen over, and the hills surrounding the little village of Mount Airy were covered with snow. The canoe had just been hauled up from the bottom of Indian River, where he had lain for four long, dismal months, wondering what was to become of him and the six thousand dollars he had carried down with him when he was "Snagged and Sunk" by the big tree that was carried out of Sherwin's Pond by the high water. You know that Roy Sheldon discovered him with the aid of his "water-scope,"

that Joe got his canoe back (a little the worse for his captivity, it must be confessed, for there was a gaping wound in his side), and that the money quickly found its way into the hands of the officers of the Irvington bank, from whom it had been stolen by the two sneak-thieves who were finally captured by Mr. Swan and his party.

Before this happened Matt Coyle's wife and boys had been shut up in the New London jail to await their trial, which was to come off as soon as Matt himself had been arrested. The truth of the matter was, the Indian Lake guides were so incensed at Matt for his daring and persistent efforts to break up their business and to ruin the two hotels at the lake, that they threatened to make short work of him and all his worthless tribe; and as the guides were men who never said a thing of this sort unless they meant it, the authorities were of opinion that the old woman and the boys would be safer in the New London lock-up than they would be if confined in the tumble-down calaboose at Irvington. But now it appeared that Matt Coyle could not be arrested

and brought to trial, for the good and sufficient reason that he was dead. He was drowned when the canvas canoe was snagged and sunk.

Joe Wayring and his chums declared, from the first, that if the squatter had attempted to run out of the river into Sherwin's Pond during the freshet that prevailed at the time of his flight, he had surely come to grief. If three strong boys, who were expert with the oars, could not pull a light skiff against the current that ran out of the pond, how could Matt Coyle hope to stem it in a heavily-loaded canoe and with a single paddle? If he had been foolish enough to try it, he would never be heard of again until his body was picked up somewhere in the neighborhood of the State hatchery. The finding of the canoe and his valuable cargo at the bottom of the river led others to Joe's way of thinking, and it was finally conceded on all hands that the squatter would never again rob unguarded camps, or renew his attempts to "break up the business of guiding." Nothing remained, then, but to remove his wife and boys to Irvington and hold them for trial at the next term of the circuit court. The grand

jury first took the matter in hand, and Joe Wayring and his chums, much to their disgust, were summoned to appear before it as witnesses.

When Tom Bigden and his cousins, Loren and Ralph Farnsworth, heard of that, they shook in their boots. And well they might; for, as you know, Tom was accessory to some of Matt's violations of the law. More than that, rumor said that the old woman had told all she knew, and that she had even gone so far as to assure the officers of the Irvington Bank that she and her family would not have been half so bad as they were, if one Tom Bigden had not advised and urged them to commit crime.

"It's all over with me, boys," groaned Tom, when one of his school-fellows incidentally remarked in his hearing that he had seen Joe Wayring and his two friends take the train for Irvington that morning to testify before the grand jury. "You know Joe is jealous of me and that he will do anything he can to injure me."

"Well," said Ralph, plunging his hands deep into his pockets and looking thoughtfully

at the ground, "what would *you* do to a fellow who was the means of having you tied to a tree with a fair prospect of a good beating with hickory switches on your bare back? Would you be friendly to him or feel like shielding him from punishment?"

"But I didn't tell Matt to tie Joe Wayring to a tree and thrash him," retorted Tom. "I never thought of such a thing."

"I didn't say you did," replied Ralph. "I said you were the cause of it, and so you were; for you told Matt that you had seen the valises that contained the six thousand stolen dollars in Joe's camp-basket."

"Matt was a fool to believe it," said Loren. "One little camp-basket wouldn't hold both those gripsacks."

"That doesn't alter the facts of the case," answered Ralph. "Matt did believe the story, ridiculous as it was, and Tom's fate is in the hands of a boy whom we have abused and bothered in all possible ways ever since we have been here."

"And we didn't have the slightest reason or excuse for it," added Loren.

"So you're going back on me, are you?" exclaimed Tom.

"Not at all. We are simply telling you the truth."

"Perhaps Joe doesn't know that Tom put it into Matt's head to follow him and his friends to No-Man's Pond," suggested Loren. "I haven't heard a word said about it."

"Neither have I; but that's no proof that Joe doesn't know all about it," answered Ralph.

"Who do you think told him?" asked Tom. "It couldn't have been Matt Coyle, for I told him particularly not to mention my name in Joe's hearing, or drop a hint that would lead him to suspect that Matt had seen me in the Indian Lake country."

"The squatter didn't care *that* for your injunctions of secrecy," said Ralph, snapping his fingers in the air. "What he said to you during those interviews you held with him ought to convince you that he would just as soon get you into trouble as anybody else. Being a social outcast, Matt believes in mak-

ing war upon every one who is higher up in the world than he is."

"Well," said Tom, with a sigh of resignation, "if Joe knows as much as you think he does, my chances of getting out of the scrapes I've got into are few and far between. He'll tell everything, and be glad of the chance. I wish from the bottom of my heart that we had never seen or heard of Mount Airy."

"Joe Wayring will tell nothing unless it is forced out of him," said Ralph stoutly; and for the first time in his life Tom did not scowl and double up his fists as he had been in the habit of doing whenever either of his cousins said anything in praise of the boy he hated without a cause. If Joe was as honorable as Ralph seem to think he was, Tom thought he saw a chance to escape punishment for his wrong-doing. "He'll not commit perjury nor even stretch the truth to screen you," continued Ralph, as if he read the thoughts that were passing in Tom's mind. "But he'll not volunteer any evidence; I am sure of that."

If Ralph had been one of Joe Wayring's most intimate friends he could not have read him bet-

ter. The latter was very much afraid that he would be compelled to say something that would criminate Tom, but to his surprise and relief the members of the grand jury did not seem to know that there was such a fellow in the world as Tom Bigden, for they never once mentioned his name. If the old woman and her boys had tried to throw the blame for their misdeeds upon his shoulders, they hadn't made anything by it. All the jury cared for was to find out just how much Joe and his friends knew about the six thousand dollars that had been stolen from the Irvington Bank; and as the boys knew but little about it, it did not take them long to give their evidence. Finally one of the jurymen said:

"Matt Coyle bothered you a good deal by stealing your canvas canoe and other property, I believe."

Joe replied that that was a fact.

"Would you prosecute him for it, if you had a chance?"

Joe said he never expected to have a chance, because Matt was dead.

"Perhaps he is, and perhaps he isn't," said

the juryman, with a laugh. "Matt Coyle is a hard case, if all I hear about him is true, and it sorter runs in my mind that he will turn up again some day, as full of meanness as he ever was."

"You wouldn't think so if you could see Indian River booming as it was on the day we came home," said Joe, earnestly. "It must have been a great deal worse when Matt saw it, but he had the hardihood to face it."

"And went to the bottom," added Roy.

"Would you have the law on him for tying you to a tree and threatening to wallop you with switches?" asked the juryman.

"No sir, I would not," said Joe, truthfully. "All we ask of Matt Coyle or any other tramp is to keep away from us and let us alone."

"Do you believe any one told Matt that you had the bank's money and sent him to No-Man's Pond to whip it out of you?"

"No, I don't."

"Matt's boys stick to it that such is the fact."

"I don't care what Matt's boys say or what they stick to," answered Joe. "You can

imagine what the evidence of such fellows as they are amounts to. Folks who will steal are not above lying, are they?"

"That juryman isn't half as smart as he thinks he is," said Roy, when he and his companions had been dismissed with the information that they might start for Mount Airy as soon as they pleased. "I was awfully afraid that his next question would be: 'Did you ever hear that Tom Bigden was accessory to Matt Coyle's assault upon you at No-Man's Pond?' You could not have wiggled out of that corner, Mr. Wayring."

"I didn't wiggle out of any corner," answered Joe. "I made replies to all the questions he asked me, didn't I? That juryman knew his business too well to ask me any such question as that. My answer would have been simply hearsay, and that's not evidence. See the point?"

"Why, didn't Jake Coyle declare in your hearing that Tom Bigden told his father that the money was in your camp-basket?" demanded Arthur.

"Well, what's that but hearsay? Do you

expect me to take Jake's word for anything? I didn't hear Tom tell him so."

"No; but you have as good proof as any sensible boy needs that Tom did it. If not, why did Matt fly into such a rage at the mention of his name, and cut Jake's face so unmercifully with that switch?"

"I don't believe that would pass for evidence, although it might lead the jury to put a little more faith in Jake's story and Sam's," answered Joe. "We didn't come here to get Tom into trouble. Didn't they say at the start that all they wanted of us was to tell what we knew about that money? We've done that, and my conscience is clear. I think Tom will take warning and mind what he is about in future."

"I'll bet you he won't," Roy declared. "He'll get you into difficulty of some sort the very first good chance he gets."

"If he does, and I can fasten it on him, I'll give him such a punching that his cousins won't know him when they see him. I'm getting tired of this sort of work, and I'll not put up with it any longer. If Tom will not leave

off bothering us of his own accord, I'll make him."

In due time the jury returned a "true bill" against Jake Coyle for burglary. Mr. Haskins had little difficulty in proving that Jake broke the fastenings of his door before he robbed the cellar, gave a list of the things he had lost, and Rube Royall, the watchman at the hatchery, testified that those same articles appeared on Matt Coyle's table on the following morning. Jake went to the House of Refuge for five years; but nothing could be proved against Sam and the old woman, and they were turned over to a justice of the peace to be tried for vagrancy. They got ninety days each in the New London workhouse.

"There, Ralph," said Tom, when he read this welcome news in his father's paper. "You said Matt Coyle didn't care the snap of his finger for my wishes, but now you see that you were mistaken, don't you? Matt never told Joe Wayring that I sent them to his camp after that money, and his boys didn't blab it, either. If they had, Joe would have said some-

thing about it when he was brought before the grand jury."

"Well, what are you going to do to Joe now?" inquired his cousin. "I mean, what kind of a scrape are you going to get into next?"

"I do not intend to get into any scrape," answered Tom; and when he said it he meant it. "I shall treat Joe and everybody who likes him with the contempt they deserve. I wish I might never see them again. I tell you, fellows, I feel as if a big load had been taken from my shoulders. Matt will never again demand that I shall act as receiver for the property he steals, his vagabond family are safe under lock and key, I am free from suspicion, and what more could I ask for? For once in my life I am perfectly happy."

But, as it happened, Tom was not long permitted to live in this very enviable frame of mind—not more than a couple of hours, to be exact. Of late he had stayed pretty close around the house when he was not at school. He could not bear to loaf about the village, as he used to do, for fear that he might hear

something annoying. But on this particular day (it was Saturday) he was so light of heart that he could not keep still, so he proposed a walk and a cigar. He and his cousins did not mind smoking on the streets now, for they had long ago given up all hope of ever being admitted to the ranks of the Toxopholites. But their desire to belong to that crack and somewhat exclusive organization was as strong as ever. Another thing, they were not on as friendly terms with the drug-store crowd as they used to be. A decision rendered by umpire Bigden during a game of ball excited the ire of George Prime and some of his friends, and as the weeks rolled on the dispute waxed so hot that on more than one occasion the adherents of both sides had been called on to interfere to keep George and Tom from coming to blows over it. Ralph reminded his cousin of this when the latter proposed a walk and a cigar.

"Oh, Prime has forgotten all about it before this time," said Tom confidently. "He has had abundant leisure to recover his good-nature, for the fuss began last fall."

"Don't you owe him something?"

"Yes; about fifty cents or so. But George isn't mean enough to raise a row about a little thing like that."

Ralph and Loren had their own ideas on that point; and when they walked into the drug store and looked at the face Prime brought with him when he came up to the cigar-stand, they told themselves that if the clerk had had opportunity to recover his good-nature, he certainly had not improved it. He looked as sour as a green apple.

"Hallo, George," said Tom, cordially.

"How are you!" was the gruff reply.

"Fine day outside," continued Tom. "Been sleigh-riding much?"

"A time or two. What do you want?"

"Some cigars, please."

Prime languidly reached his hand into the show-case and brought out a box.

"Chalk these, will you?" said Tom, after he and his cousin had made their selections.

Without saying a word the clerk turned and walked toward the prescription counter at the back part of the store. Tom evidently

thought the matter settled, for he gave Ralph the wink, lighted his cigar and was about to go out when Prime called to him. Tom faced around, and saw that he held in his hand something that looked like a package of bills.

"I'll chalk this, because you've got the cigars and I can't very well help myself," said Prime, as he came up. "But the next time you want anything in our line you had better come prepared to settle up. Do you know how much you owe the house?"

"I've kept a pretty close run of it," said Tom shortly, "and I guess seventy-five cents will foot the bill. These weeds are three for a quarter, I suppose?"

"That's the price; but you owed me just four times seventy-five cents before you got these last three. There's your bill!"

Tom opened his eyes when he heard this. He picked up the paper that Prime tossed upon the show-case before him, and saw that, if the figures on it told the truth, he had smoked much oftener than he supposed.

"George, "said he, as soon as he could speak, "I don't owe you three dollars."

"You owe me three dollars and a quarter, counting in the three you just got," was Prime's reply.

"I say I don't; and what's more to the point, I won't pay it. If you want to impose upon somebody and make him pay for cigars that you have smoked yourself, try some one else. You can't come it over me."

"You mean to repudiate your honest debts, do you?" said Prime hotly. "Well, I don't know that I ought to have expected anything else of you. A fellow who will associate with tramps and thieves, as you have done ever since you poked your meddlesome nose into Mount Airy, is capable of anything."

"Look here," said Tom, his face growing red and pale by turns. "Step out from behind the counter and say that again, will you?"

"I can talk just as well from where I stand," was Prime's answer; and then he clenched one of his hands and pounded lightly upon the top of the show-case while he looked fixedly at Tom. "Perhaps you think because you were in the woods when these things happened that

the folks in Mount Airy don't know all about them," he went on.

"What things?" Tom managed to ask, while Ralph and Loren nerved themselves for what was coming.

"What things!" repeated Prime, in a tone that almost drove Tom frantic. "Don't you suppose I know as well as you do that when Matt Coyle stole Joe Wayring's canvas canoe a year ago last summer, he did it with your knowledge and consent? I will say more than that. You urged him to take it."

"Why—why, you—" Tom began, and then he paused. There was a look on Prime's face which told him that there was more behind; and now that he was in for it, Tom thought it would be a good plan to find out just how much the Mount Airy people knew of his dealings with the squatter.

"It has all come out on you," continued Prime. "And I know, too, that it was through the information you gave him that Matt followed Wayring to No-Man's Pond and committed that assault upon him."

"The idea!" exclaimed Tom, trying to look

surprised, though inwardly he quaked with fear. "I never told Matt to follow Joe Wayring to No-Man's Pond. I never saw him while I was in the woods,—did I, boys?" he added, appealing to his cousins.

"I know a story worth half a dozen of that," said the clerk, before either Ralph or Loren could collect their wits for a reply. "Some of the sportsmen who were stopping at one of the Indian Lake hotels saw you wait for him at a certain place for more than an hour; and when at last Matt arrived, you held quite a lengthy consultation with him."

Tom was so amazed that he could not utter a word. Prime seemed to have the story pretty straight—so straight, in fact, that Loren did not think it best for him to deny it; so he hastened to say:

"If all these ridiculous things which you say you have heard are true, how does it happen that they did not come before the Grand Jury?"

"There were two good reasons for it," answered Prime. "In the first place, there was no one to appear against Tom; and in the

second, Jake Coyle, who was the only one of the family tried before the Circuit Court, was not accused of stealing the canoe or of making an assault upon Joe Wayring. He was charged with breaking open the door of Haskins's cellar, and for that he received his sentence. If Matt Coyle had been on trial, there would have been other and more interesting developments. I tell you, Mr. Bigden, it was a lucky thing for you that he was drowned."

"Now, let me say a word in your private ear," said Tom, who had had time to take a hasty review of the situation. "There is such a thing as wagging your tongue too freely, and it constitutes an offense of which the law sometimes takes notice. You don't want to publish the outrageous stories you pretend to have heard of me. They are false from beginning to end."

"Why, bless your heart, I can't publish them," answered the clerk, with a most provoking laugh. "The facts are as well known to other folks as they are to me. Every man. boy, and girl you meet on the street knows them by heart."

This astounding piece of news fairly staggered Tom. While he was trying to frame a suitable rejoinder a party of ladies came into the store, and the clerk hastened away to attend to them. This gave Tom and his cousins an opportunity to escape, and they were prompt to avail themselves of it.

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed Loren, as soon as he could speak freely without fear of being overheard. "Tom, Tom, what have you brought upon yourself!"

"I was afraid that something of this kind would be sprung upon me sooner or later," groaned the guilty boy. "Every girl I meet on the street knows all about it," he added, recalling the clerk's last words. "I don't believe it. Or, if they have heard about it, they don't take any stock in it, for I have received just as many invitations and gone to as many parties as I ever did. Can you two raise three dollars and a quarter between you? Then lend it to me, and I will get Prime's debt off my mind without a moment's delay."

"That's the idea," said Ralph, approvingly. "Go now while those ladies are in the store,

and he can't say anything more to annoy you."

Loren had a five-dollar bill which he handed over, and Tom got it broken at the most convenient place, because he did not want to wait for Prime to make change. He laid the exact amount of his indebtedness upon the counter, pocketed his receipted bill, and left the store firmly resolved that he would never cross its threshold again.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE WHEELMAN.

LOREN and Ralph often declared that if Tom Bigden's "cheek" had not been "monumental," he never could have lived through the winter as he did. He went everywhere, and although, to quote from the Canvas Canoe, he did not "shoot off his chin" quite as much as he formerly did, or take as deep an interest in things, he did not by any means keep in the background, as most boys would have done under like circumstances. As time wore on, he and his cousins began telling one another that Prime did not confine himself to the truth when he said that every one in the village knew how intimate Tom and Matt Coyle had been during the two last summers, for certainly he was as well treated and as cordially received wherever he went as he ever was. Joe Wayring and his friends always

had a good word for him, and that went far toward satisfying Tom that they did not believe he had anything to do with the loss of the canvas canoe or with the No-Man's Pond affair. It was not long before their example and silent influence began to tell upon Tom, who more than once astonished his cousins by saying, in their hearing, that he believed it would be worth while for him to turn over a new leaf and try to lead a better life.

Meanwhile Joe and his chums thoroughly enjoyed themselves in a quiet way, as boys always do when they have abounding health, clear consciences, and plenty of things around them to make life pleasant. In company with some of their school-fellows, of whom Tom Bigden and his cousins generally made three, they paid several visits to Indian River to fish through the ice for pickerel, going Friday night and returning Saturday. They saw any amount of sport during these short outings, and always brought home a fine string of fish ; but they never drew so valuable a prize from the river as Joe and his friends did when they went there during the winter vacation. Noth-

ing ever happened to mar their pleasure during these encampments, not even when Roy took Tom Bigden to task somewhat sharply for shooting a grouse after the first of January. Tom pleaded ignorance of the law, promised never to do it again, and so the offense was overlooked.

But winter with its storms and drifts and sports passed away, and spring came with the usual alternations of driving rains and high winds which quickly cleared the lake of ice, and made the huge limbs of the grand old trees on the lawn sway about in every direction. Finally the croaking of frogs was heard from the marshes and the maple buds appeared; whereupon sleds, skates and toboggans were tumbled unceremoniously into some convenient corner, to be taken care of when other duties were not quite so pressing, and Joe and his inseparable companions shouldered their double-barrels and sallied out in search of snipe. But in due time hunting gave way to trout-fishing; and I have heard it said that Old Durability held his own, and captured quite as many fish as any rod that was brought

into competition with him. Occasionally I heard Joe boast over some extra fine strings Fly-rod had taken for him ; but as I was kept closely confined to my quarters I did not see them.

At last my time came. As soon as the spring rains ceased and the mud disappeared and the roads became ridable, I was taken out for a spin. At first Joe rode with considerable caution, for he was afraid (so he told his chums) that I might "kick up and throw him"; but his skill came back with practice, and before a week had passed we were on exceedingly good terms. He devoted nearly all his leisure time to me, and although he kept up his membership with the various organizations to which he belonged, he was not unfrequently called upon to hand over a fine that had been imposed upon him for non-attendance of drills and parades. Of course the annual review of the Mount Airy Fire Department was not forgotten, but the canoe meet was, and for the first time in years the summer passed without a single struggle for the championship of Mirror Lake. The boys who were enthusiastic

canoeists twelve months ago were earnest wheelmen now.

As soon as the weather became settled a new question presented itself to Joe Wayring and his friends, and it was one that could not be decided at a moment's notice. Up to this time it had been understood that there was but one place at which their summer vacation could be passed, and that place was Indian Lake; but four weeks of comparative inactivity were not to be thought of this year.

"Of course if we go to the lake we shall have more fishing and see less excitement than we did last year and the year before, because Matt Coyle will not be there to trouble us," said Arthur. "But rolling about on a blanket under the shade of an evergreen is slow work compared with a brisk run over good roads on a horse who never tires, and who asks nothing but a good rubbing, and no oats, when his day's task is done, to keep him in good trim. Camping out makes a fellow too lazy for any use; and I am not as much in favor of being lazy as I used to be."

"It is quite the fashion for wheelmen to

start off singly or in small parties, and travel through the country and see what they can find that is worth looking at," said Roy. "Let's send for a guide-book and go somewhere."

"That's what I say," replied Joe. "But what guide-book shall we send for, and where shall we go?"

"Through our own State, of course. Uncle Joe Wayring says that a fellow ought not to visit foreign countries until he has seen the wonders of his own."

"Of course it is a settled thing that we three spend this vacation on the road," said Joe. "And when we start, I propose that we go prepared to stop wherever night overtakes us. Then if we can't find a hotel, or if the farmers object to taking in strangers who have no letters of introduction, we can camp by the road-side, and snap our fingers at people who live in houses and sleep under shingle roofs."

"How about the grub?" said Arthur.

"Oh, that'll be all right. We do not intend to go outside of a fence, and consequently we

can purchase supplies anywhere along the road."

"We mustn't forget to take our pocket fishing-tackle cases with us and—say, fellows," exclaimed Roy, suddenly interrupting himself, "I saw an advertisement the other day, of a Stevens rifle furnished with a bicycle case, and it struck me at once that it would be a nice thing to have along on a trip of this kind. If we have one or two of those handy little weapons in the party, we can shoot a mess of young squirrels as often as we get hungry between times."

"I wish we had just one more year on our shoulders," said Arthur, "for then we could apply for admittance to the League of American Wheelmen. No doubt we would find friends in it who could give us pointers."

"The year will pass soon enough, and when it has gone you may wish it back again," replied Joe. "It makes no difference if we are not in the League. Wheelmen are always good to one another, and I shall make it my business to bounce every strange bicyclist who comes to town, if I can catch him. If he

has been on the road I will get some ideas out of him before I let up."

Roy and Arthur said that was a suggestion worth acting upon, and the three made such good use of the opportunities that were constantly presented that by the time the school term was ended and the long vacation came, they considered themselves fully posted on all important matters relating to their proposed run across the State and back. The strange wheelmen who now and then ran into Mount Airy for a day or two proved to be a jolly, companionable lot of fellows, and full of stories of the road which they were as ready to tell as the boys were to listen to them.

"Let me give you one word of warning," said a bronzed bicyclist, who had come all the way from Omaha on his wheel: "Do not neglect your training for a single day. "I've no doubt that you can run all round this little burg without feeling any the worse for it, but you will find that three or four days in the saddle will test your endurance. I remember of hearing of a couple of wheelmen who started

to run from Cleveland to Buffalo. They made no special preparation for the journey, believing, no doubt, that their short daily runs had sufficiently hardened their muscles; but when they reached their destination they were in a somewhat demoralized condition. They hung around the Genesee House for a day or two, and took the cars when they wanted to go home."

"We'll never do that," said Arthur. "If our wheels take us away from home they must bring us back."

"Well," said the Veteran, "you will find that it will take a good many motions with the pedals to carry you over a journey of seven hundred miles; but get yourselves in good trim before you start, inquire your way at every place you stop, steer clear of tramps, look out for skittish horses, keep off the tow-path, don't get mad if you meet some old curmudgeon who will not give you your share of the road, and you will come out all right and have a splendid time besides. You'll sleep as you never slept before, eat every crumb placed within your reach on the table,

and handle things as though there was no break to them."

"Why should we give the tow-path a wide berth?" inquired Roy. "Our guide-book says that the road from New London to Bloomingdale is knee-deep in sand, and advises all wheelmen going that way to take to the tow-path."

"You'll find the unspeakable mule there," replied their new friend, "and he'll get you into trouble with the canalers. Now, a mule doesn't care any more for a bike than he does for the boat he is towing; but he pretends that he is very much afraid of it. I have seen them turn like a flash and run as if they were scared half to death: but it was all put on, for they were always careful to stop before they took up all the slack in the tow-line, and got themselves jerked off off the path into the canal. Of course that makes the steersman mad, and he tells you what he thinks of you and your wheel in the first words that come into his mind. Besides, a fellow on a bike offers so tempting a mark that no canal boy I ever saw can resist firing a stone at him. If

he don't throw at you, it will be because he can't find anything before you get out of range."

"If a fellow should try that on me I'd run him down and give him such a thrashing that he'd not trouble the next wheelman who came along," said Tom Bigden, who happened to come up while the conversation was in progress.

"I wouldn't advise you to try it," said the stranger, with a light laugh. "In the first place you couldn't catch him, for as soon as he saw that you were overhauling him, he would leave the tow-path and take to the rocks; and while you were following him, if you were foolish enough to do it, some of his companions would run up and tumble your machine into the canal. The easiest way is the best."

"I suppose we shall find the country people all right?" said Joe.

"W-e-l-l,— yes; the majority of them are all right, but now and then you will find a mean one even among the farmers, who will tell you that your machines are a nuisance because they scare the horses; and if you meet

such a man as that on the road, he'll take particular pains to crowd you off into the ditch. Take it by and large, the road is an admirable school for young fellows like you. You've got to take the bad with the good in this world, and make up your minds that what can't be cured must be endured."

"So it seems that even 'cycling has its shadowy side," said Roy, as he and his friends walked homeward after thanking the Omaha wheelman for the advice and information he had given them. "Tramps and canalers must be avoided, and we mustn't get angry when some crusty old fellow pushes us off the road."

"And there are the dogs," said Arthur. But he didn't say anything about them, did he?"

"No; but other wheelmen have, and I should think that in some places (in the South, for instance, where every granger keeps half a dozen or more worthless curs around him) they would be a big source of annoyance," said Joe. "But others have gone through all right, and we are going, too."

"I wonder if Tom Bigden and his cousin are going anywhere," said Arthur. "If they are I hope they will take some route that will lead them out of our line of travel."

The others hoped so, too. While they tried to live in peace with Tom, they did not care to have him for a traveling companion.

Joe and his chums thought it best to heed the Omaha man's friendly word of caution, and if they had ridden hard before, they rode harder now. A ten-mile spin in the cool of the evening was an every-day occurrence. Of course they did not ride on Sunday, and, furthermore, they did not think much of a fellow who did.

The morning set for the start dawned clear and bright, and after an early breakfast Joe Wayring waved his adieu to the family who had assembled on the porch to see him off, and wheeled gaily out of his father's grounds just in time to meet Arthur Hastings. Picking up Roy Sheldon a few minutes later, the three set off at a lively pace over a good road, their long journey being fairly begun. The trunks which contained most of their luggage had

been forwarded to the wheelmen's headquarters at New London, with the request that they might be held until called for; but several handy little articles, which they might need at any time, were made up into neat bundles and tied to their safety-bars. Of course their lamps and cyclometers were in their places, and so were their Buffalo tool-bags; and each boy carried slung over his shoulder a bicycle gun-case containing a fourteen-inch pocket rifle. They were innocent-looking little pop-guns, but "spiteful things to shoot," and one of them came very near bringing the boys into serious trouble.

"I wouldn't take a dollar for my chance of enjoying myself this trip," said Roy, as he wheeled into line behind his companions. "During our two last outings Matt Coyle and his interesting family made things quite too lively to suit me, but they'll not bother us any more. Now isn't this glorious? I remember of reading somewhere that if one has a hankering for wings, and feels as if he would like to glide out into space and leave the world with its cares and troubles behind, all he

has to do is to buy a bicycle, and learn to ride it."

Roy's companions must have felt a good deal as he did, for both of them had something to say about the "joys that no one but a wheelman knows," but their exuberance of spirit did not lead them to commit the blunder of riding hard at the start. When they drew up in front of wheelmen's headquarters in New London that night, their cyclometers registered thirty-six miles; not a very speedy run, to be sure, but then they had not set out with any intention of trying to break the record. In accordance with their request the hotel clerk assigned them to rooms "as close together as he could get them," and after seeing their wheels safely stored, the boys disappeared for a while to remove all travel-stains from their hands, faces and clothing. Then they ate a hearty supper, and adjourned to the reading-room to decide where they would spend the evening. A long time had elapsed since they last visited New London, and they had planned to remain in the city until they had taken a look at all the new

things there were to be seen. That would take three or four days, they thought; but, as it hoppened, some strange events occurred which prolonged their stay, and threatened at one time to bring their trip to an inglorious close.

"What's going on to-night, any way?" said Arthur, picking up a paper and glancing at the advertisements that appeared under the heading "Amusements!" "Some pianist, with an unpronounceable name, assisted by a celebrated baritone, is to hold forth at the Academy of Music."

"Let's take that in," said Joe; and the matter was settled, for all the boys liked to listen to good music.

Having plenty of time at their disposal Joe and his companions strolled leisurely along, taking note of all that passed in their immediate vicinity, and now and then stopping to look in at a show-window, especially if it chanced to be one in which bicycle goods or hunting and fishing equipments were displayed. That, I believe, is characteristic of people, both old and young, who are not accustomed to the sights of a big city—a sort of

distinguishing trait, so to speak. At any rate the interest that Joe and his chums seemed to take in the well-filled windows attracted the attention of a spruce young fellow, who after following them for an entire block, and looking up and down the street as if to make sure that his movements were unobserved, stepped up to the nearest of the boys and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Beg pardon," said he, smilingly, as Arthur Hastings turned and faced him. "You young gentlemen are wheelmen, I take it."

Arthur replied that the stranger had hit center the very first time trying.

"Members of the L. A. W.?"

"No, but we hope to be next year. You see we are not quite eighteen yet. Do you ride?"

"Certainly. Owned a bike ever since I was knee-high to a duck. Wouldn't know how to exist without it. Going anywhere? If you are, perhaps some of us can be of assistance to you."

"You're very kind, and I'm sure we are obliged to you," said Arthur. "We've

always found wheelmen ready to tell us anything we wanted to know."

"Best lot of fellows in the world," replied the stranger, with enthusiasm. "And the best of it is, you will find them wherever you you go. A wheel is a passport to the best society in the land. You don't live in the city? I thought not. You are from the country."

"What makes you think that?" inquired Joe.

"Didn't we get it all off?" exclaimed Roy, turning first one side, then the other, and giving his uniform a good looking-over. "I'm sure I used my brush the best I knew how."

"Yes, it is pretty dusty, that's a fact," said the stranger. "I ought to know, for I have been on the road myself to-day. There's nothing about you or your uniforms to attract attention, but I knew you were from the country the minute I put my eyes on you, because you are so careless with your money. Look at that. If it hadn't been for me you would have lost it, beyond a doubt."

So saying he held out his hand and exhibited

a well-filled purse; whereupon all the boys instinctively thrust their hands into their pockets.

"If it wasn't so full I should think it was mine. No, it does not belong to me, although it looks enough like my purse to be its twin brother," said Joe, after he had made sure that his modest sum of pocket-money was safe.

"It doesn't belong to me, either," added Roy.

"And I am sure it isn't mine," chimed in Arthur. "Where did you find it?"

"Right down there, close to your feet," replied the stranger, indicating the exact spot. "It must belong to one of you, for I know it wasn't there when I stopped at this window not two minutes ago to look at those bicycle stockings. What shall I do with it? I've got to leave town on the first train."

"Give it to a policeman," suggested Roy. "He'll take care of it and find the owner, too."

"Well, you are a greeny, that's a fact," exclaimed the stranger, in tones that were very different from those he had thus far used in addressing the boys. "Can't you see that the

purse is chuck full, and don't you know that the owner will be willing to give something handsome to get it back? There'll be a big reward offered for it in to-morrow's papers, and—"

"I don't know who would be mean enough to demand a reward for restoring lost property," said Roy, with a slight accent of contempt in his voice.

"I fail to see where the meanness comes in. What is there to hinder me from keeping the whole of it? But I was taught to be honest, and if I had time to stop over and take this money to the owner to-morrow, I should thankfully pocket the fifty or hundred dollars that he would be sure to give me, and think none the less of myself for doing it. "Say," added the stranger, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper, "I'll tell you what I'll do with you fellows, seeing you're wheelmen. I'll give the purse into your keeping for twenty-five dollars, and in the morning you can claim the reward. I haven't the least doubt that you will make a hundred dollars by it. Why, just look here," he continued, lifting the catch and exposing to

view a big roll of greenbacks. "There's money, I tell you, and the reward you will receive for restoring it will pay all your expenses during a pretty long bicycle tour. I wouldn't think of trusting every one as I am willing to trust you, but seeing that you belong to the fraternity—eh?"

Roy and Arthur were plainly becoming disgusted with their new acquaintance. They opened their lips to utter an indignant refusal of his generous offer; but before they could say a word, Joe Wayring spoke up.

"I'll take you," said he, quietly.

"All right," said the stranger briskly, while Roy and Arthur were struck dumb with amazement. "You are the most sensible man in your party—meaning no offense to your friends, *of* course."

"Why, Joe," began Roy, as soon as he found his tongue.

But Joe shook his head and waved his open hands up and down in the air, indicating by this pantomime that his mind was made up, and it would be of no use for his friends to argue the matter.

"It's all right," said he, when he had succeeded in silencing them. "If there are a hundred dollars to be made honestly, I don't know why we should turn our backs upon it. We've a long run before us, our expenses will be heavy—"

"That's the idea!" exclaimed the now smiling stranger. "I don't suppose that your fathers are as liberal with you as they might be. I know mine wasn't, and that my supply of pocket-money was mighty slim when I had to depend upon him for it. Where's the cash?"

"Hand over the purse," replied Joe.

"Let me see first that you have twenty-five dollars to give me," was the answer.

"I'm a wheelman," said Joe, severely. "And my machine is a passport to the best society in the land—eh?"

"Of course; of course. But you see—"

"And would I be admitted to the best society in the land if I were untruthful or dishonest?" continued Joe, while his two friends wondered what in the world he meant by addressing the stranger in his own words. "Hand over what

you have found, if you want me to make a deal with you. We're from the country, you know, and consequently we are suspicious of every stranger we meet in the city. If you had your passport—I mean your wheel—with you now, why then I shouldn't be afraid of you."

"Haven't I showed you that I am perfectly willing to trust you to return this big wad of greenbacks to the owner? Of course if I had the faintest suspicion that you would not give it to him—"

"I was taught to be honest, the same as you were. Being a wheelman, I have no more intention of taking advantage of you in any way than you have of taking advantage of me."

So saying, Joe thrust his hand into his pocket. Observing this movement, which seemed to be indicative of a desire on the young wheelman's part to have the negotiations brought to a close, the stranger stepped closer to him and slyly passed over the purse.

"Be quick," said he, in a cautious whisper. "Some one might see us."

"What if they do?" replied Joe, speaking

in his usual tone of voice. "This is a fair, square and honest transaction, as I understand it. "If it isn't—"

"Of course; of course it is. But don't publish it. Be in a hurry, for a policeman might happen along."

"Let him happen. We haven't done anything to make us afraid of a policeman."

"There it is. Now hand out the twenty-five dollars."

As soon as the fingers of Joe Wayring's right hand closed about the article in question, he took the other hand out of his pocket; but he brought it forth empty.

"I am very glad to see that you are not afraid to trust a humble member of the noble fraternity of wheelmen," said he, as he lifted the catch and opened the purse. "Now, when I take this money to its owner in the morning, he will pay the reward out of what it contains, won't he? Well, I'll do the same by you, and you may trust me to tell him (I am a wheelman, you know) that I have already paid twenty-five dollars to—" Hallo? Where are you going? A bargain is a bar-

gain. Come back and get your money. Moses Taylor! Where did he go in such haste?"

Joe might well ask that. The place whereon the strange wheelman had stood a second before was vacant, and he had disappeared from view.

CHAPTER III.

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

THE expression that came upon Arthur's face and Roy's when the sleek and plausible stranger hurried away from them, without waiting for the money that Joe was getting ready to give him, was a study. Joe gave them one quick glance, and then, utterly heedless of the fact that he was drawing the amused attention of many of the passing crowd, placed his hands upon his hips and laughed—not boisterously, as he would if he had been in the woods or even in Mount Airy, but none the less heartily.

"Was—was it a bite?" inquired Arthur, as soon as he could speak.

"I should say it was," replied Joe, wiping the tears from his eyes. "And you fellows thought I was taken in by it. Don't you read the papers, you two? Why, that game is old

enough to be gray-headed. No one ever tried to play it on me before, but I recognized it in a minute."

"I confess that I don't see where the trick comes in," said Roy.

"Don't you? Well, look here. The reason that fellow gave for turning the purse over to us was because he couldn't wait until morning to claim the reward that would surely be offered for its recovery, being obliged to leave town by the first train. Some folks would believe that story. The purse is fat enough to excite the cupidity of a dishonest man, who, nine times out of ten, will pay the sharper out of his own pocket, rather than open the purse and let him see what there is in it. Now, suppose I had given that fellow twenty-five good and lawful dollars of the Republic; let's see what I would have received in return."

As Joe said this he turned out the contents of the purse, and Roy and Arthur discovered, to their no small astonishment, that what they had taken for a greenback was nothing more nor less than the advertisement of a quack medi-

cine, warranted to cure every conceivable form of disease. It was wrapped around a roll of brown paper, the ends being turned over to hide it from view.

"He thought I would give him the money he wanted out of my own pocket," continued Joe. "But when he found that I was not quite so green, and that his little game would be exposed in a minute more, and perhaps in the presence of a policeman, he took himself off."

Yes, that was one reason why the sharper left without taking time to say good-by, but there was another that the boys knew nothing about. I must speak of it here so that you will be able to understand what happened afterward.

Just as Joe Wayring was about to open the purse, the sharper cast a furtive glance over his shoulder and saw standing within a few paces of him, and intently watching his every movement, a short, thick-set man, dressed in a plain gray suit. It was evident that the two were not strangers to each other, for when the man in gray scowled and jerked his thumb

over his shoulder, the sharper lost no time in getting out of sight. At the same instant Roy Sheldon turned his face that way, and the man in the gray suit, as if afraid of being seen and recognized, promptly wheeled about and looked toward the street. But he did not lose sight of the boys. He followed them to the Academy of Music, and sat within a few feet of them during the whole of the performance.

"I'll chuck these things down there so that they can never be used to fool anybody," said Joe, when he and his friends had examined the purse and its contents to their satisfaction, and with the words he tossed the unlucky sharper's stock in trade into an opening between the grating on which they stood and the bottom of the store window. "I wonder what he thinks of country wheelmen by this time."

"He was a pretty sleek talker, wasn't he?" said Roy. "Do you suppose he rides?"

"No," answered Arthur, emphatically. "He is a professional swindler, and has no time to devote to riding. Besides, such chaps don't get into the L. A. W. Well, we've made a very fair beginning; only twelve hours from

home, and one adventure to our credit already. I hope if we have any more they will all turn out as well as this one has."

Having been shown to their seats in the Academy of Music, the boys devoted themselves to the business of the hour and forgot all about the sharper and his disappointment. Their quiet demeanor evidently excited the surprise of the gentleman in gray, and drew from him some remarks which were addressed to one who came in and took a seat beside him just as the entertainment was about to begin.

"Takes it most too cool, don't he?" said the man in gray. "You're quite sure that there's no mistake about it? Bear in mind that I haven't seen him since his last escapade two years ago, and he has had time to change a good deal since then."

"How in the world can there be any mistake about it?" asked the other, in reply. "Don't I see him every day, and oughtn't I to know him if anybody?"

The first speaker drew a photograph from the inside pocket of his coat and looked at it intently, now and then raising his eyes to com-

pare it with the profile of one of the boys in front, which was occasionally turned toward him. At length he appeared to be satisfied with his examination, for he replaced the picture, at the same time remarking, with something like a sigh of resignation:

"It's a go if you insist upon it; but I want you to understand very distinctly that if any trouble follows the arrest, I am not the one to stand the brunt of it."

"How is there going to be any trouble about it? Didn't the old man stand by you before? He did, and paid you well into the bargain. He'll do the same this time, and you may depend upon it."

"But you say he isn't at home now."

"I know it; but I am simply obeying orders, and my word is good till he comes."

"If the boy has everything he wants, including all the money he can spend, and is as kindly treated and as well cared for as you say he is, I don't for the life of me see why he should run away from home," said the man in gray. "Boys don't generally desert home

and friends without a cause. At least they didn't the first time I was on earth."

"Well, this foolish fellow will do it every chance he gets, because he is determined to find his father. His uncle always tried to make him believe that his parents were both dead; but some gossip or another had to go and tell him different, and the old man hasn't seen a days's peace of mind since. He lives in constant fear that the boy will give him the slip. This is the second time he has tried it, and some day he'll get off. Then there *will* be a time, I tell you."

"Why doesn't his uncle tell him where his father is, and let him go and see him?"

"Oh, that would never do. Don't you know that the money goes with the boy? His father isn't fit to handle it, for he is a worthless scamp who would squander the last dime of it in less than no time. The law gave him to his uncle, who is also his guardian, and he intends to hold fast to him."

"And the money, too, I suppose. Well, all I have to say is, that if I were in that boy's place my uncle would have to keep a double

guard over me night and day. If I wanted to see my father I'd see him in spite of everybody. Besides, the boy is pretty near old enough to choose his own guardian."

"Don't say that," whispered the other, hastily. "Whatever you do, don't say that where he can hear it. That's a point of law that he doesn't know anything about, and his uncle wouldn't like to have him posted."

"Pooh! I shan't say anything. If I am employed to catch him as often as he runs away, so much the better for my pocket-book. I am too old to quarrel with my bread and butter."

When the entertainment was ended Joe Wayring and his chums left with the others, and close behind them in the aisle came the man in gray and his companion. In the hall they encountered two dense living streams that came pouring down from the galleries, and in the crush that followed the boys became separated. Joe and Arthur found each other again on the sidewalk, but nothing was to be seen of Roy. As Arthur locked arms with his friend to prevent a second separation,

they noticed a little knot of curious people gathered by the curbstone, and saw a close carriage driven rapidly away.

"Move on!" exclaimed a burly policeman. "It's nothing at all except a fellow resisting arrest. Move on, please."

The two boys would have been glad to wait for Roy; but as the guardian of the night emphasized his order by resting his club lightly against Joe's back, they concluded that they had better move on. They walked the length of the block and then returned, but no Roy Sheldon was in sight. There were but few people coming out of the hall now, but there was the watchful policeman with his ready club and his stereotyped command:

"Move on, please. Don't block up the walk."

"Roy has certainly come out before this time, and that blue-coat has driven him away," said Joe. "He knows the road to the hotel, and there's where we shall find him."

The boys turned about and went down the street again, and the first thing that attracted their attention when they entered their hotel

was the familiar uniform which they had adopted for their own—dark blue tights, white flannel shirt with blue trimmings, and white helmet. The boy who wore it was standing with his back to them, examining the register.

"I never noticed before that Roy was so fine a figure," whispered Arthur. "Look at the muscles on his legs. He fills out those tights as though he had been melted and poured into them."

Without saying or doing anything to attract the boy's notice, the two friends slipped up behind him, and Arthur threw his arms over his shoulders.

"Now, you runaway, give an account of yourself!" he exclaimed.

The effect produced by these innocent words was surprising in the extreme. In less than a second the supposed Roy Sheldon proved that he was quite as muscular as he looked to be. Uttering a cry of surprise and alarm he doubled himself up like a jack-knife and lunged forward with all his strength, and then almost as quickly jerked himself backward. By the first

movement he came within a hair's breadth of throwing Arthur Hastings heavily on his head; and by the second he slipped out of his grasp like an eel. Then he straightened up and faced him with clenched hands and flashing eyes.

"Don't touch me!" he began, fiercely. "If you or any of your hirelings lay an ugly finger on me again—"

When he had said this much he stopped and looked hard at Arthur and then at Joe, while an expression of great astonishment settled on his face. My master and his friend were equally amazed. That was Roy Sheldon's uniform, if they ever saw it, but it wasn't Roy who was in it, although he looked almost exactly like him. There were the same clear-cut features, hazel eyes and wavy brown hair, and the same faint suspicion of a mustache; but they did not belong to Roy Sheldon. A second look showed them that.

"Who are you?" demanded the young fellow, at length.

"I think that is a proper question for us to ask you," replied Arthur, who, having never

before been handled so easily by any boy of his size, felt disposed to resent it. "What are you doing in our uniform, we'd be pleased to have you tell us."

"Your uniform!" exclaimed the stranger eagerly. "Are you from Jamestown?"

"No. Never heard of such a place about here. Don't even know where it is. We are from Mount Airy."

"Then we are even," said the stranger, in a disappointed tone," for I don't know where Mount Airy is."

"Then of course you live a good way from here."

"Not so very far; not more than twenty miles, but it might as well be a thousand for all I know about this city. But you are wheelmen, of course. Well, now I wish—but say," added the speaker, as if something had just occurred to him. "Why did you grab me and call me a runaway?"

"Because we thought you were. I mean we took you for a runaway from our party," said Joe; and then he wondered why it was that the stranger exhibited so much anxiety and

even alarm at the words. "There is another fellow in our party, but we have lost him in some unaccountable manner."

"Does he look anything like me?"

"He does, indeed; so very much like you that when we saw you with our uniform on we took you for our missing friend. You are a little stouter than he is. That's all the difference there is in your figures; but to look at your faces a little distance away, any one not well acquainted with you would take you for twin brothers. How did you happen to choose that uniform? What club do you belong to?"

"I don't belong to any club. How does it come that you happened to choose it when there were so many more that you might have taken?"

"We made it up all out of our own heads," replied Arthur.

"I can't say that I did. I copied it. The Jamestown boys wear it, and I have seen a good many bicyclists running along the road past our island dressed in the same way."

"Your island!" repeated Joe.

"Yes; my island prison, for that is just

what it is to me. Let's go into the reading-room," said the stranger, seeing that the hotel clerk was becoming interested in their conversation. "I don't care to have everybody hear what I say."

He moved away from the desk as he said this, and Joe and Arthur followed, lost in wonder. If there wasn't a mystery in this young fellow's life he was out of his head. That was plain to both of them.

"My real name is Rowe Shelly," began the stranger, taking possessing of a chair at one of the tables and drawing two others alongside of him, "but when I registered I signed myself Robert Barton, and gave Baltimore as my home."

"What made you do that? What have you been up to?" inquired Joe, while Arthur began to wonder if they had fallen in with another sharper who would presently make an effort to cheat them out of some money.

"I haven't done anything that either of you would not do if you were in my place," answered young Shelly, if that was really his name. "To make a long story short, money is

at the bottom of all my trouble. My grandfather, when he died, willed the most of his large property to my father, who was his only child, on condition that he quit the sea and settled down on shore with his family, mother and me. There was a step-son, who had assumed the family name in the hope of getting some of the money, but he was left without a dollar. Our home at that time was near some southern seaport whose name I do not remember, for I was too young to know anything. This step-son, who had been dubbed "colonel" on account of his supposed wealth, happened to be at home when grandfather died, and what did he do but get possession of the will, spread the report that father had been lost at sea, take out letters of administration, turn mother out of the house, and have himself appointed my guardian. I don't pretend to know what trickery he resorted to, to bring all this about, but I know he did it."

"Humph! I wouldn't live with such a villain," exclaimed Joe, who was deeply interested. He believed this strange story, and so did Arthur, who told himself that he must

have been about half crazy when he suspected a boy who bore so close a resemblance to Roy Sheldon of being a sharper.

"I don't live with him any more," replied Rowe. "I have left him for good; but of course I did not take the trouble to ask his consent."

"Oh, that's what made you jump and look frightened when I caught hold of you and called you a runaway, was it?" said Arthur. "If your guardian finds you can he make you go back against your will?"

"Certainly. He has often given me to understand that he will have full control of my actions as well as of my property until I am twenty-one years old."

"Then he told you what isn't so," declared Joe.

"I guess not," answered Rowe doubtfully. "At any rate, when I ran away from him two years ago he gobbled me with the aid of a policeman and took me back."

"But you are older now than you were then," said Joe. "How old are you, if it is a fair question?"

"I was eighteen last month."

"Then snap your fingers at that guardian of yours, and tell him you are done with him."

"That wouldn't make a particle of difference to him," replied Rowe. "He would have detectives after me, and I don't know but there are some on my track this very minute. That's why I registered under a fictitious name, and adopted this uniform. It is worn by so many wheelmen around here that it will not be likely to attract attention. But I am going to change it the first thing in the morning, trade off my Rudge safety for another wheel, and then put for the country and stay there as long as my money lasts."

"Say, Joe," said Arthur suddenly, "he looks a good deal like Roy Sheldon, doesn't he?"

"He is the very picture of him," answered Joe, surprised.

"And you say," added Arthur, this time addressing himself to Rowe Shelly, "that your guardian put detectives on your track when you ran away from him two years ago,

and that he has probably got them on your track to-night?"

"I don't think I used those words, but that was what I meant," replied Rowe. "Why do you ask the question, and what makes you glare at me in that fashion?"

"I didn't know that I was glaring at you," said Arthur. "But I wish from the bottom of my heart that you had changed that uniform for another a hundred years ago, or else that you had never adopted it, for it has been the means of getting one of the best fellows that ever lived into trouble."

"Art," exclaimed Joe, starting up in his chair, "do you think—do you mean to say—"

"Doesn't everything go to show it?" exclaimed Arthur, who was very highly excited. "His uniform is the counterpart of ours; he looks so much Roy that a stranger couldn't tell one from the other if he were to see them together; he has the best of reasons for believing that his guardian has put detectives on his track, and who knows—"

"Good gracious!" cried Joe, starting up in his turn; "I never once thought of that."

"What are you afraid of?" inquired Rowe, whose face betrayed the keenest anxiety and apprehension. "I hope you don't think that my resemblance to your friend has brought him into difficulty."

"That is just what we are afraid of," replied Joe soothingly, while Arthur Hastings paced the room like a caged tiger. "But, of course, nobody can blame you for it. If one of the detectives you spoke of saw him, he probably mistook him for you, just as Arthur and I mistook you for Roy Sheldon. It's a case of mistaken identity, and that's all that can be made of it."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Arthur; "it is a clear case of abduction."

"We'll have to see a lawyer about that."

"Then let's be about it. What are we wasting time here for?"

"Let us first make sure that Roy has been spirited away by somebody who thought he was Rowe Shelly. Say, Art, you remember the carriage that was driven away just as we came

out of the Academy of Music, don't you? Well how do we know but Roy was in it, and that he was the fellow who resisted arrest?"

"That's so," exclaimed Arthur. "Suppose we go right back and interview that policeman if we can find him."

When Arthur proposed this plan Rowe Shelly's face grew white again.

"That will be a dead give-away on me, won't it?" said he.

"I don't see why it should be," replied Joe. "We're not going to tell any one that we have seen you. If you are afraid of it, go somewhere while we are gone, and then we can say, if we are asked questions we don't care to answer, that we don't know where you are."

The young stranger evidently thought this a suggestion worth heeding, for when Joe and his companion left the room he followed slowly after them, first carefully reconnoitering the office to make sure there was no one there he did not want to meet.

"What's your opinion of that fellow, any way?" asked Joe, as he and Arthur hurried along the street toward the Academy of Music.

"He tells a queer story, but I really believe there are some grains of truth in it."

"So do I," answered Arthur. "And if it turns out that Roy has been kidnapped, I shall believe it is all true. I wish that Shelly boy had been in Guinea before he adopted our uniform."

"Or else that we had been there," added Joe. "He's got as much right to it as we have. Look here, Art. We mustn't let the Mount Airy folks know anything about this."

"Not by a long shot. They'd order us home as they did when they read in the papers that Matt Coyle had tied you to a tree in the woods. If Roy is in a scrape we'll help him out of it and get well on our way beyond Bloomingdale before we say a word about it."

The boys were not obliged to go all the way to the hall in which they had passed the evening, for they met the officer of whom they were in search at the lower end of his beat. Arthur thought he looked at them rather sharply as they came up, but he answered their questions civilly enough.

"Policeman," said Joe, "will you please

tell us what sort of a looking fellow it was who was put into a carriage in front of the Academy of Music, and driven away just as the performance ended? You were on duty there at the time."

"Aw! go on now!" replied the officer good-naturedly. "He must have been one of your own crowd, for he wore the same kind of clothes."

"What was his name?" asked Arthur, whose heart seemed to sink down into his boots when he heard this answer.

"Aw, now!" said the officer again. "what's the use of my wasting my time with you? You know more about him than I do; but I will tell you one thing: you had better keep clear of him, or he will bring you into trouble. He's a bad nation. He stole a pile of money from his guardian before he ran away."

"Not the boy who was put into the carriage, if it was the one we think it was," said Joe earnestly. "In the first place, he has no guardian, and he never stole a cent, for his father gives him all the money he needs. There's been a big mistake made here, Mr. Officer."

"Haw, haw!" laughed the policeman. He turned on his heel and started back along his beat, but he did not shake off the boys. They wanted to learn something before they left him, so they kept close to him, one on each side.

"But I assure you there has been the biggest kind of a blunder made," Joe insisted. "The wrong boy has been arrested. His name is Roy Sheldon, and he left Mount Airy with us this morning. Everybody there knows him and us, too."

"No, I guess not," replied the policeman, with another laugh. "Bab's been in the business too long to make a mistake that might get him into trouble."

"Who's Bab?"

"Why, Bab—Babcock, the detective," answered the officer, in a tone which implied that he had no patience with a boy who could ask him so foolish a question. "The youngster had the cheek to appeal to me for protection, but I told him he had better go along peaceable and quiet, for it would only make matters worse for him if he didn't. I knew Bab, you see."

"Well, this is a pretty state of affairs, I must say," exclaimed Arthur, his anger getting the better of his prudence. "Of course Roy resisted, as any other decent fellow would have done under the same circumstances; and when he asked for protection from one of whom he had a right to expect it, he was told that he had better go along if he wanted to keep out of worse trouble."

"That's enough from you, young man," said the officer, shortly. "If you give me any more of your insolence I will run you in to keep company with that runaway and thief. Move on, now."

Arthur didn't wait for a second order. He faced about at once and started back toward his hotel; but Joe stayed behind. He wanted to ask another question or two, although he hardly expected that the policeman would answer them.

CHAPTER IV.

ROWE SHELLY, THE RUNAWAY.

"JUST one more word, Mr. Officer," continued Joe Wayring, when he had seen his discomfited friend Arthur vanish in the crowd, "and then I will cease troubling you."

"Be in a hurry, then," was the gruff rejoinder. "Don't say anything to confirm the suspicion I have that you are trying to make game of me, for if you do you will spend the rest of the night under lock and key, sure pop."

"I assure you that my only desire is to gain some reliable information regarding my missing friend," answered Joe, choking back his wrath. "What precinct does this man Babcock belong to?"

"He doesn't belong to any. He is a private detective, and works wherever he is called."

"What agency does he belong to?"

"Wilcox's; two-thirty-four Bank street."

"Thank you. That's one point gained. I suppose he will report the arrest at his own headquarters, will he not?"

"Very likely he will, and I'll report it to my captain."

"I wasn't aware that a private detective could make an arrest without a warrant, except in cases where there is a fight or some other violation of the public peace. I thought he was obliged to call upon a policeman."

"Well, wasn't I here?" exclaimed the officer, with some indignation in his tones. "I want you to understand that I know my business, and that you nor nobody like you can teach it to me. Move on. I've had enough of you."

"All right," replied Joe cheerfully. "But first allow me to apologize for troubling you, and to thank you for your courteous answers to my questions."

If this was intended for sarcasm it had no effect whatever upon the policeman, who walked off with a very dignified step, while Joe moved on to find Arthur Hastings. He dis-

covered him in the reading-room of the hotel, holding an earnest conversation with a young fellow in citizen's clothes. It was Rowe Shelley; but when he left his uniform in his room he seemed to have left with it nearly all the resemblance he had once borne to Roy Sheldon. Joe could see now that the two boys did not look so very much alike after all.

"I want to assure you of one thing, Wayring," said Rowe, as Joe seated himself in a chair by his side; "what that policeman told you about my stealing a lot of money before I left home, is utterly false. The little I have with me is what I have managed to save during the last two years out of my regular allowance. I have the best of reasons for believing that every cent there is in that house rightfully belongs to me, but I have never touched any of it except when it was given to me."

"Are there any stores on the island?" inquired Joe.

Rowe replied that there were not. The entire island was claimed by his guardian, who said he was Rowe's uncle, although he was no relation to him. Besides the family mansion,

and the barns and other out-buildings that belonged to it, there were four tenement houses that were occupied by his guardian's hired help.

"And I know they are not hired simply to work the place and keep the grounds in order," said Rowe bitterly. "They are employed to keep an eye on me, although they do not seem to pay any attention to me. When I had saved a little money and began laying my plans to skip out, there was not one among them to whom I could go for help, or whom I dared take into my confidence. I had to depend upon myself."

"Then what was the use of a regular allowance of money if you couldn't spend it?" inquired Arthur.

"I could save it for an emergency like this, couldn't I? Besides, whenever I wanted anything, I could send for it by some one who was coming to the city. Did you learn anything more about your missing friend? Hastings tells me that there is no doubt he was mistaken for me and sent away in that carriage."

"That is what I think," answered Joe. "I know the name of the detective who arrested him, as well as the agency to which the detective belongs. It's Wilcox's, two-thirty-four Bank street, and there's where we must go the first thing in the morning."

"Great Scott!" cried Arthur. "Can't we do anything for Roy before morning? Must he be put in a cell and—"

"By no means," exclaimed Rowe. "Your friend will fare as well at my home as you will here at a hotel. Beyond a doubt my guardian's steam yacht was in waiting at one of the piers along the river side, and Roy is probably half way to the island by this time. Of course the detective will stay with him till he gets there, for fear that Roy will jump overboard or do some other desperate thing to escape from Willis."

"Who is Willis?"

"He is my guardian's superintendent and my jailer. At least, that is what I call him, although he is very friendly to me, and has seldom interfered with me. When I ran away two years ago, he followed me up and put the

detectives on my track. I'd got away sure, if it hadn't been for him."

"Of course if Babcock goes to the island he can't report the arrest to his superior before morning," said Joe, turning to Arthur. "So what's the use in going there (to the agency, I mean) before we can learn something?"

"I don't see why you should go to the agency, or give yourselves the least uneasiness about the matter," said Rowe. "As soon as Willis has taken a good look at Roy, he will know that the detectives has made a mistake, and then he will lose no time in setting his prisoner at liberty and sending him back to the city."

"We'll call upon Mr. Wilcox the first thing in the morning," said Joe, decidedly. "At least Art and I will, and you had best pack your bundle and dig out before day-light. As soon as your guardian finds out that—"

"He isn't at home," interrupted Rowe. "He has gone away somewhere on business, and that's why I am here. I took advantage of his absence."

"At any rate the search for you will be renewed when it becomes known that a mistake

has been made, and if I were in your place I would not stay here. I think you were very imprudent to come to the city at all."

"That's because you don't know what extraordinary precautions I took to make everybody think I was going the other way," replied Rowe.

"But it seems that the tricks to which you resorted, whatever they were, did not work," said Arthur. "This man Willis, who probably runs things during your guardian's absence, must have come to the city or sent word to some one to be on the watch for you. If he didn't do one or the other, how does it come that Roy was molested? Joe, what course are you going to follow when you get to the agency?"

"I'm simply going to tell the man in charge that one of his detectives has made a blunder and arrested Roy Sheldon when he thought he was arresting some one else, and ask him to undo his night's work and bring our friend back to us as quick as he knows how."

"But he'll want evidence, won't he?"

"I shall be provided with the evidence,"

replied Joe quietly. "Rowe, you wouldn't mind writing a couple of letters, one to your guardian's superintendent and the other to the detective, stating the facts, would you?"

"Why—why, I don't see how I can do it without putting the detectives on my own track," stammered Rowe, who was very much astonished at this proposition. "I'd have to sign my right name to the letters, wouldn't I?"

"Certainly. A fictitious name would be of no use to us, and we'll see that you don't get into trouble by it. Write the letters containing a full statement of the case, make yourself scarce about here without telling us where you are going, and then we can't answer any questions that may be asked us. If he don't do it," added Joe mentally, "the only thing I can do is to bring in some of father's business friends and Uncle Joe's to vouch for us, and add weight to our story. I am opposed to that, and I believe Roy himself would kick against it; for of course those friends would write the full particulars to the folks at home, and that would knock our trip across the State into a cocked hat."

"If he doesn't do it," said Arthur to himself, seeing that Rowe still hesitated, "he will find that we are not to be trifled with. I'll denounce him as soon as I can find anybody to denounce him to. He got Roy into this scrape, and it is no more than fair that he should help get him out."

"Is there no other way in which I can assist you?" inquired Rowe, after a long pause.

"There is none that occurs to me just now," answered Joe. "Can you think of any?"

"I can't think of anything. My mind is in a whirl, and has been ever since I left the island."

"I thought as much," said Arthur, drily. "Otherwise you would never come to the city and put up at wheelmen's headquarters. Don't you know that this is the very hotel of all others that you ought to have shunned?"

"I thought the very boldness of the thing would throw my pursuers, if I had any, off the track; and I believe it did, for I have seen no one to be afraid of since I came here. Do you think the chief detective will be ready

to undo this work when you ask him?" added Rowe, addressing himself to Joe.

"I think he will. I would, if I were in his place, for it would hurt my business to have it get out. If people knew that Wilcox kept such a blunderhead as that Babcock about, they would not be apt to give him much to do."

"All right. It shall be as you say," exclaimed Rowe, getting upon his feet and hastening into the office, whence he presently returned with a couple of envelopes and as many sheets of paper in his hand. "Have you any influential friends in town?" he asked, as he seated himself at the table.

"We've enough to make it exceedingly uncomfortable for those people on the island if they don't turn that boy loose in a little less than no time," replied Arthur, with emphasis. "Tell your man Willis to put that in his pipe."

"He'll not need any such threat to quicken his movements," said Rowe, with a smile, the first one Joe had seen on his face that evening. "When he discovers that Babcock has not

brought him the right boy, he will be only too glad to get rid of him, But I'll put it in."

After a few minutes spent in rapid writing Rowe handed Joe the following, which was addressed to George Willis, Shelly's Island, New London Harbor:

"You have probably found out by this time that the man Babcock, whom you notified to be on the lookout for me, has made a mistake that is likely to get him and every one concerned in it into serious difficulty. He has made a prisoner of Roy Sheldon, who lives in Mount Airy. He has friends there, as well as in this city, who will make it hot for you if you don't treat him well while he is on the island, and sent him back with the least possible delay. Tell my guardian, when he returns, that I have grown weary of waiting for him to tell me where my father and mother are, and have set out to find them. I know I shall succeed this time, and then there will be a change of administration on Shelly's Island, or I shall miss my guess.

"Now I should like to know what you mean by spreading the report that I stole a lot of money before I went away. You know it to false. If any of my money has disappeared

(it is my money, mind you, and not my guardian's) I would as soon think you took it as to accuse anybody else.

"If you haven't sent that boy back already, do it as soon as you read this, if you don't want to have some papers served on you."

"Is that satisfactory?" inquired Rowe, as Joe passed the letter to Arthur.

"Perfectly. If Willis fails to understand it, it will not be your fault. But why don't you get another guardian and put it out of this man's power to harass you with detectives every time you leave the island?"

"I wish to goodness I could; but I can't. The law put him where he is."

"And the law can take him out. When he was appointed your guardian he must have perjured himself if he swore that he was your next of kin. But here's a question: Do you know that your parents are still alive?"

"No; I don't know it, but I think so. I do know, however, that my father was not lost at sea, as my guardian reported. Since that time people who know him have seen and talked

with him. He was alive when I tried to find him two years ago."

"Where does he live?"

"Somewhere in the State of Maryland. On the coast, I suppose, for he is fond of the water, and has been a sailor all his life."

"Now just think a moment," said Joe, earnestly. "Can't you see that you show a wonderful lack of *something* in starting off on your wheel to hunt a needle in a haystack? You must remember that Maryland has an area of more than eleven thousand square miles, not counting in the bay, which has a coast line three hundred and eighty miles in length. You have set yourself something of a job, old fellow."

"So I have," said Rowe nervously. "Do you know, I never once thought of that? There was but one idea in my mind, and that was to get safely off the island and away from New London, so that I could hide myself among strangers. Then, after the excitement had had time to die away, and my guardian had given up looking for me, I thought it would be the easiest thing in the world to run down into

Maryland and find my parents. It wouldn't be too long a run, would it? I think I have heard of a man who went from San Francisco to Boston on his wheel."

"No doubt you did; and that man, if you are thinking of the same one I am, is now on his way around the world. The run wouldn't trouble you, but finding the objects of your search would not be so easy as you seem to think. You have gone about it in the wrong way."

"How would you act, if you were in my place?"

"My first hard work would be to rid myself of that guardian," exclaimed Joe.

"Haven't I told you that he was appointed by the court?"

"Of course he was, or else he could not have slipped into the position. But you were too young to have any voice in the matter. You are older now than you were then, and have reached an age when the law says you are capable of choosing your own guardian."

Rowe became greatly excited when he heard this. He threw his pen upon the table, jumped

to his feet, and paced the floor with long and rapid strides.

"I hope you know what you are telling me," said he, as soon as he could say anything.

Joe replied that he was sure of his ground.

"How shall I go to work?" continued Rowe. "What shall I do first?"

"Go to some honest lawyer, tell him your story just as you have told it to us, going rather more into details, and he will tell you what to do. If you give the case into his hands, he will probably advertise for your people. He'll not start off alone to hunt them up, unless he knows pretty near where they are; I can tell you that much."

"And will the law really help me to rid myself of that man?" cried Rowe, as if he could hardly believe it. "And will I have my father and mother to live with me, and be free to come and go, as other fellows do? It seems too good to be true. Why didn't you tell me this long ago?"

"I have been on the point of telling you half a dozen times," answered Joe, "but

somehow I always got switched off on another track. You know it now, and if you remain shut up any longer deprived of your rights, it will be your own fault."

"I shall not let the grass grow under my feet, I assure you," said Rowe, seating himself at the table and once more taking up his pen. "I shall not leave the city until this thing has been settled. How would it do to add a line to the letter I have written to Willis?"

"Telling him what you intend to do?" exclaimed Joe. "I wouldn't. Spring it on 'em and take them by surprise before they have a chance to run away with any of the money. If the man who claims to be your uncle got his position by fraud, he wouldn't be above cheating you if he saw an opportunity to do it without detection."

It was much harder work for Rowe to write this letter than it was to write the first, because he was so nervous and excited that he could scarcely hold his pen steady. But he finished it at last, and handed it over to Joe to read. It was much the same as the other, ex-

cept that there was no allusion made to the story that Willis or somebody else had spread abroad, that Rowe had appropriated a sum of his guardian's money to help him in his runaway scheme. Then the letters were sealed, stamped and addressed, and Joe went out to put them into the box. He wanted them to reach their destination as soon as possible; and furthermore, he intended to allow the one that was addressed to the detective ample time to have an effect before he called at the agency on the following morning, They had done all that could be done that night, and when Joe went back to the reading-room he announced his intention of going to bed.

"Then I will bid you good-by, for it is not at all likely that I shall be here when you come down in the morning," said Rowe, shaking each of them cordially by the hand. "If you only knew what a terrible load you have lifted from my heart by the friendly encouragement and advice you have given me, you would believe me when I say that I am glad to have met you, and sorry indeed that your friend got into trouble through me. Please

say as much to him when you see him, and add that I shall live in hopes of some day making his acquaintance. I suppose you can't tell me where to address you in case I should have anything interesting to communicate?"

Joe was sorry to say that he could not; for although their proposed route had been marked out in their road-book before they left home, there was no certainty that they would stick to it. But he and his friends would like much to know how Rowe succeeded in his efforts to assert his rights, and a letter addressed to them at Mount Airy would follow them until it caught them. There were their cards. Good-night and good luck!

"He's a simple-hearted fellow and totally unused to the ways of the world; and although he hasn't got much sense to boast of in some things, he can sling ink better than I can," said Arthur, as he and Joe ascended to their rooms. "Do you suppose he has ever been to school?"

"No, I don't. He had a private teacher."

"Then why didn't he make a confidant of him?"

"Because he was afraid to. Perhaps his teacher was some poverty-stricken scholar, who was told to keep his mouth, eyes and ears closed as long as he remained on the island, and was well paid for doing it. More than that, the guardian was careful to tell his side of the story first, so that the tutor would be likely to take anything Rowe said to him with a grain or two of allowance."

"It does not seem possible that such things can happen in this day and age of the world," said Arthur reflectively. "That fellow told us a strange story, and I shall do as I please about believing it until we hear from Roy Sheldon. Well, good-night. Call me when you get up."

The first thing the two friends did when they went down to the office in the morning was to inquire for Robert Barton; for you will remember that that was the name the runaway signed to the register.

"He left a message for you to the effect that he had decided to take the night boat for Bloomingdale," replied the clerk. "He will put in the time visiting friends there until you arrive."

"That means that Rowe Shelly has gone into hiding somewhere in the city," said Joe, as he followed Arthur into the dining-hall. "Of course he wouldn't be foolish enough to say that he was going up the river on a steamer if he really meant to do it."

"I don't know whether he would or not," answered Arthur, doubtfully. "He acknowledges to doing a great many foolish things. Putting up at this hotel was one of them."

After eating a very slender breakfast the boys inquired the way to Bank street, and left the hotel to obtain an interview with Mr. Wilcox. About half an hour later a carriage was driven up to the sidewalk, and a boy clad in a bicycle uniform got out and hurried into the hotel; but I doubt if such a boy and such a uniform had ever been seen in the Lafayette House before. He seemed anxious to escape observation, for it was not until he had concealed himself behind one of the wide front doors that he stopped to pay his hackman. Then he stepped up to the desk and looked at the astonished clerk with his right eye. He wore a handkerchief over the other one, and

there was a suspicion of blood on the handkerchief. One sleeve of his shirt had disappeared, and so had his cap; and when the clerk came to take a second look at him, he saw that, although his uniform was dry, it looked as though it had been dumped in the harbor—as indeed it had.

"Well, well," exclaimed the clerk, as soon as he had in some measure recovered from his astonishment. "What in the world have you been doing to yourself, Mr.—ah—er—Barton?" he added, consulting the register to make sure of the name. "Did the steamer sink or burn up?"

"What steamer? I don't know anything about a steamer."

"Why, didn't you tell the clerk whom I relieved that you were going to take the night boat for Bloomingdale?"

"Not much I didn't. I wasn't here last night, and furthermore, my name isn't Barton. There's my name, Roy Sheldon; and I came to town yesterday afternoon in company with that fellow and that one," said the new-comer, pointing out Joe's name and Arthur's.

"Then, who was the chap who left a message for Wayring and Hastings?" exclaimed the puzzled clerk.

"I'm sure I don't know. Did he beat you out of anything?" inquired Roy, thinking of the swindler who had tried to palm off those bogus greenbacks upon him and his friends.

"Oh, no! He settled up all fair and square, and said he would wait for Wayring and Hastings at Bloomingdale. It couldn't have been your brother, could it? He looked like you."

"Don't own any brother. Say," cried Roy, an idea striking him. "Wasn't it Rowe Shelly?"

The clerk backed away from his desk and looked at Roy without speaking.

"I don't know who else it could have been, for I was mistaken for him, kidnapped, and carried over to the island, and just escaped being taken to sea by the skin of my teeth," continued Roy, growing excited as he thought of it. "Rowe must have been here and scraped an acquaintance with my friends, or he wouldn't have left a message for them. I did say I would make trouble for somebody if I

ever got ashore, but since I have had time to think the matter over, I am not as mad as I was. Did it blow much here last night and early this morning? Well, I was out in the whole of it."

"Do you mean to say that that fool Rowe Shelly has run away from home again?" said the clerk, as if he could hardly believe the story.

"He has run away, but I don't know whether he's a fool or not. I am inclined to think he isn't. Where are those friends of mine?"

The clerk didn't know. They left the hotel after inquiring the way to Bank street, but he couldn't tell what business they had on hand, or how long they would be gone.

"They'll show up when they get ready," said Roy. "In the mean time, if you will give me the key to forty-seven, I will go up and try to make myself a little more presentable."

"What have you been doing to get yourself into such a plight?" asked the interested clerk.

"The story is too long to be told in detail,

and all I can say just now is that I have had a time of it. But if Rowe got away I don't care. I would go through as much more to help him, although he is a perfect stranger to me. Don't say anything about this, please, for I positively decline to be interviewed. I don't want my folks to hear of it, for fear they will order me home," added Roy to himself. "That's the plain English of the matter."

So saying he took his key and went up to his room.

CHAPTER V.

ROY IN TROUBLE.

YOU will remember that it was during the crush which occurred at the Academy of Music when the "gallery gods" came pouring down into the main hall from both sides, that Roy Sheldon became separated from his friends Joe and Arthur. While he was making his way slowly toward the door, he felt a hand laid upon his arm, and without turning his head to see who it was, supposing, of course, that one of his companions was close at his side, Roy took hold of the hand and drew it through his arm. When he reached the sidewalk he looked around to say something uncomplimentary regarding the rough fellow who had elbowed him rather too sharply in his haste to get out, and then he found that it was not a boy who had hold of him, but a man whom he had never seen before—a brown-whis-

kered man dressed in gray clothes. Thinking of the swindler whom he and his friends had encountered during the early part of the evening, Roy made an effort to twist himself out of the stranger's grasp, but found that he could not do it. The man had a grip like a vise.

"Softly, softly," said he, in a low tone. "The game's up, and you might as well give in. You know me, and you know, too, that I wouldn't see you harmed. The carriage is ready and waiting."

"I don't know you, either," said Roy, greatly astonished. "Let go my arm, or I'll black your eye for you."

"If you strike me," said the man, who seemed rather surprised at this display of spirit, "I shall have to put the irons on you right here, and you don't want to make a scene before all these people. It wouldn't look well for a young fellow of your standing."

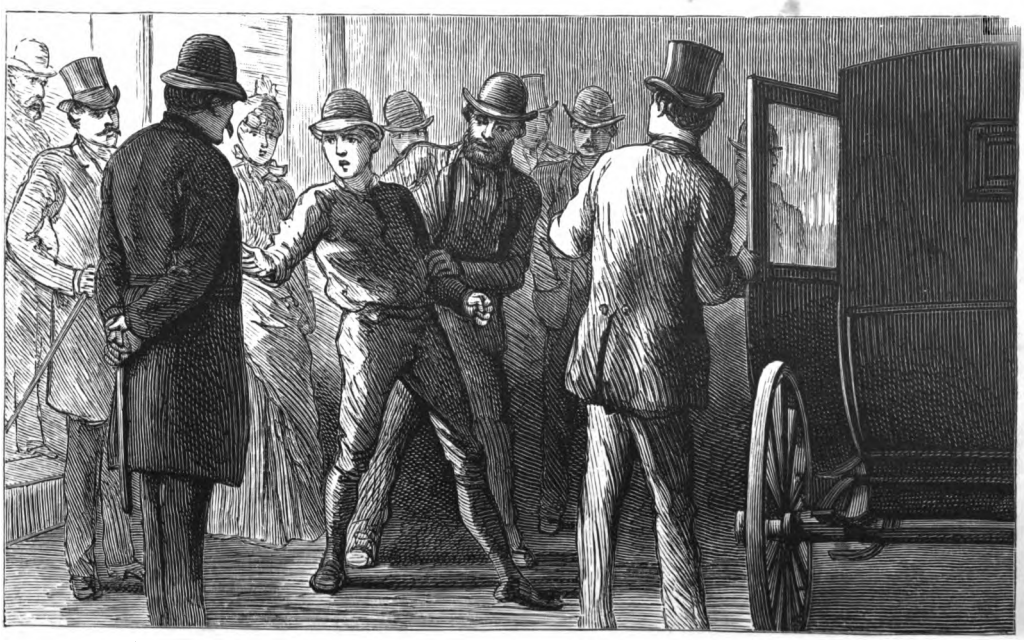
Roy, too amazed to speak again, looked around for his friends; but they seemed to have disappeared very mysteriously. He was surrounded by strange people, the majority of whom seemed to be paying no sort of attention

to him, while others looked on in wonder, and the rest laughed at him. An arrest in the crowded streets of New London was too common an occurrence to attract more than a passing notice.

All this while Roy was being led slowly but surely toward a carriage, whose door was held invitingly open by a rather genteel-looking man who carried a heavy cane in his hand. When Roy saw that preparations had been made to convey him away secretly, he recovered his power of action and the use of his tongue at the same instant. He resisted with all his strength, and finally appealed to a policeman who, for a wonder, chanced to appear at that opportune moment.

"What do you mean, anyway?" he exclaimed, giving his arm a sudden wrench, but with no other effect than to cause the man in gray to tighten his grasp until Roy could scarcely endure the pain. "Mr. Officer, do you see what this villain is doing? I ask you to interfere for my protection."

Roy, in his simplicity, supposed that the guardian of the city's peace would rush up and



THE ARREST.

knock his assailant down with his club, or else take him into custody ; but he did nothing of the sort. He strolled leisurely up to the carriage, saying, in a drawling tone :

"I suppose it is all right, Bab ? "

"Of course it is," replied the man in gray, "or I wouldn't be in it. I am too old a dog to bark up the wrong tree."

"It's all right, sonny," said the policeman, soothingly. "Go along quiet and peaceable and you won't get into trouble with Bab. He'll take good care of you."

"But who is he, and by what authority does he commit this outrage ? " demanded Roy, who was so angry and astonished that he hardly knew what he was saying.

But his indignant words met with no verbal response. The policeman, who, according to Roy's way of thinking, ought to have helped him, lent effective assistance to his assailant by taking the boy by the other arm and gently pushing him into the carriage. The minute the two men released their hold of him, Roy jumped for the other side of the vehicle, intending to open the door and take to his heels,

but the man who carried the heavy cane was there before him.

"What's the use of cutting up like this?" said he, with a cunning smile that exasperated the prisoner to the highest degree. "One would think, from your actions, that you were going to prison, instead of to the pleasantest home that any boy of your size ever had. Why can't you stay there and be contented? There's many a youngster in this city who would be glad to be in your boots."

As the man said this he mounted to a seat on the box beside the driver, and at the same moment his companion, who had got into the carriage and closed the door behind him, seized Roy by the arm and drew him away from the window."

"Sit down and take it easy," said he, pleasantly. The game is up, as I told you, and you might as well give in and wait until you see another chance to run away."

"Run away!" repeated Roy. "Where from?"

"Oh, come now. What's the use of playing off in that way? I know it's quite a while

since I saw you, but I knew you the minute I put eyes on you. That chap didn't fool you, did he?"

"What chap?"

"Why, the fellow who tried to play the pocket-book game on you and those two wheelmen you picked up somewhere."

"Did you see that operation?" exclaimed Roy, forgetting for the moment that he was being taken somewhere against his will, and that there might be disagreeable things in store for him.

"I saw it all. I followed you from the Lafayette House—say, Rowe, don't you think you were foolish to go to that hotel where all the wheelmen stop? That was the very first place I went to find you when Willis told me that you had skipped again. What made you go there?"

"Who is Willis?" asked Roy, in reply.

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed his companion, in a tone of disgust. "If you want me to talk to you, you must talk sense."

"Well, then, where are you going to take me?"

"That isn't sense, either. *I* might be liable to make a mistake, seeing it's two years and better since I last met you, but Willis ought to know you."

"Who does he think I am?"

"Oh, quit your nonsense. I am in no humor for foolishness. I was up all last night working on a case, and now I've got to stay up till I see you safe at home. I'm cross for want of rest."

"You don't talk as if you were cross," said Roy. "I'll stop bothering you if you will tell me who you are, who you think I am, and why you kidnapped me as you have done."

"Bless your heart, you won't bother me if you will only talk sense. I didn't kidnap you. I arrested you for a runaway, and there's my authority for doing it."

As the man said this he squared around on his seat, drew back the lappel of his coat, and the light of a street lamp, which streamed in through the window at that moment, fell full upon a detective's shield.

"My name is Babcock," he continued. "Of course you remember me now. Bab, you

know; the same man who arrested you when you lit out two years ago. *Bab*, you recollect."

"Never heard your name before, and never saw you, till you bounced me back there in the hall," said Roy, who told himself that he was learning something every minute."

"Oh, come now," replied the detective, in an injured tone. "Everybody knows Bab."

"Everybody except me, perhaps. But you never arrested me for the simple reason that I never ran away from home. It's much too pleasant a place for me to leave voluntarily, I can tell you. It is plain enough to me that you have mistaken me for somebody else."

"But there's Willis," said the detective; and if Roy could have seen his face distinctly he would have had the satisfaction of knowing that he had aroused a train of disagreeable thoughts in that official's mind.

"Who's Willis?" asked Roy, again.

"Your uncle's superintendent; the man on top with the driver. He has known you all your life, and he says you are Rowe Shelly."

"Well, I am not. I am Roy Sheldon, and

my home is in Mount Airy. If you don't want to take my word for it, tell your hackman to drive us to the Lafayette House. You will find a couple of my friends there, and in an hour I can bring a hundred more from among New London's best business men."

"If you have so many acquaintances in the city, why did you put up at a hotel? That statement will hardly wash."

"It's the truth whether it will wash or not," Roy insisted. "Having just so much time at our disposal, we made all our arrangements before we left home, and we didn't want our friends to interfere with our plans in any way. You may save yourself trouble by going to my hotel."

"No; I don't guess I would," replied the detective, with a yawn. "I'd a little rather trust Willis than you, for you know that you are full of tricks, and that you came within one of giving me the slip two years ago. Remember it, don't you?"

Roy replied that it had slipped his mind entirely, and then went back to the point from which he started, hoping that by setting

out on a new tack he could induce the detective to tell him who Rowe Shelly was, where he lived, and why he had run away from home.

"If you are an officer, as you pretend to be, what is the reason you did not arrest that fellow when he was trying to play the pocket-book game on my friends and me?" said he. "You say you saw it all."

"And I say so yet; but I didn't want to have anything to do with him just then, for I had bigger game in sight. That was you, and I was afraid you would recognize me if I showed you my face. So I just nodded to the swindler to let him know that I was on to his little performance, pointed down the street, and he took the hint and cleared out."

"Oh, that's the reason he went off in such a hurry, was it?" exclaimed Roy. "We thought it was because he was afraid his game was about to be exposed. Now that I think of it, I believe I did see you standing near by, but your back was turned toward us."

"No doubt. And you saw me when I took you in at Peach Grove two years ago, didn't you? Come, now, be honest."

"I don't know where Peach Grove is, and I tell you I never saw you before to-night," replied Roy. "How far do you intend to take me in this close carriage?"

"Not much farther. We're most to the pier now."

"Then I've got to go the rest of the way by water, have I?" said Roy. "Why don't you let down the windows? It's suffocating in here."

"It's pretty warm, that's a fact," assented the detective, taking off his hat and drawing his handkerchief across his forehead. "You'd holler if I put the windows down."

"No, I wouldn't," protested the boy.

"And that wouldn't be pleasant; because it would attract attention," continued the detective. "You'd be sorry enough for it after you'd had time to cool off, and, besides, your uncle wouldn't like to have so much publicity given to this matter. He wants everything done on the quiet, and I promise you it shall be, if you will do just as I say."

"Who's my uncle?" asked Roy, believing that he had got upon the right track at last.

"Why, your uncle; Colonel Shelly; the man who owns the island where you live," answered the detective. And then, as if he was angry at himself for giving his questioner this much satisfaction, he added: "I declare, if Job was here in my place he'd lose patience and be tempted to shake you. But go on with your foolishness. I've got to keep awake somehow."

"Then let down the windows so that a fellow can breathe," said Roy, prompt to take advantage of this permission. "If I speak louder than my ordinary tone of voice it will not take you long to put them up again. There, now. That's better. You say you are going to take me to an island. Are there any people on it?"

"A dozen, or such a matter, I should say."

"Have they been long in Colonel Shelly's employ?"

"Some have been there always, and some ain't."

"That's all I want to know on that point," said Roy, who was greatly relieved. "Of course the minute those old-timers see me

they will know that you have made a mistake."

"Of course, they won't know nothing of the kind," replied the detective, angrily. "They know, and so does everybody else, that Bab understands his business and is not in the habit of making mistakes. Don't you build any hopes on that."

"Colonel Shelly will know that I am not his nephew, won't he? I can at least build some hopes on that."

"He ain't at home, and you know it as well as I do. If he was, you and I wouldn't be here in this carriage. You waited until he went off somewhere on business, and then you skipped."

"Oh, that was the way of it. The colonel must be rich if he can afford to own a whole island so near a big city like New London, mustn't he?"

"Aw! Go on now," replied the detective. "He's awful rich, and so are you. At least you will be one of these days."

"That's news to me. I've seen the time when I thought I was well off if I had fifteen

cents in my pocket. What's the matter?" inquired Roy, seeing that his companion was twisting uneasily about on his seat. "Don't I talk fast enough to keep you awake?"

"You make me tired," answered the detective. "But I'll tell you one thing, young man. If Willis has made a mistake and you are not Rowe Shelly, you're a trifle the coolest customer I have seen for many a day."

"I don't deny that I was frightened at first," said Roy, "but I don't feel at all uneasy now. Of course I know that you have made a mistake, for there's nothing that you or any one else can gain by running me off in this way."

"Well, look here," said the detective earnestly. "If there's been a blunder made, you mustn't blame me for it. Blame Willis."

"What's the name of the boy you took me for—Rowe Shelly? Do I look much like him?"

"That's another question that makes me tired," answered Babcock. "Look like him! You *are* him, otherwise you wouldn't be here."

"But I say I am Roy Sheldon and nobody

else, as I can prove if you will give me a chance. When we get to some place where we can borrow a light, I want you to take a good look at my face. You never saw a boy who looked exactly like me, and I'll bet on it."

This was just what the detective had determined to do. The boy was altogether too much at his ease to suit him; he did not act at all as a disappointed runaway ought to act, and the fear that, for once, he had committed a blunder was almost enough to drive Babcock frantic. If he had made a prisoner of the wrong boy he could look for nothing but a prompt discharge from his employer, who would not be likely to recommend him to any other private detective bureau. But then he never would have made the arrest if Willis had not urged it, and repeatedly declared that he knew Rowe Shelly when he saw him, and that there was no chance for a mistake. And besides, there was the money that Rowe was said to have stolen from his guardian! To do the detective justice he did not believe that part of the story, but told himself that

the superintendent had concocted it in order to make the case against the runaway as bad as it could be.

"I don't much like this private detective business, and never did," thought Babcock. "If there is a mean piece of work to be done, something so low down that the city officers won't touch it, we are called upon to do it. I'll have a good look at this boy's face as soon as we reach the pier, and if I am not entirely satisfied with what I see there, I'll wash my hands of the whole business, and leave Willis to take him to the island and get out of the scrape afterwards as well as he can. That's what I'll do."

Seeing that his companion had suddenly grown very unsociable, Roy settled back on his seat and thought over the situation. What would Joe and Arthur think when they missed him, and what would they do about it? When they found that he had not returned to the hotel would they become frightened, report the matter at police headquarters, and write to the folks in Mount Airy about it? The bare thought of such a thing alarmed

Roy, who was almost tempted to burst open the door and take to his heels.

"But that plan wouldn't work at all," said he to himself. "Babcock would have me hard and fast before I could get fairly on my feet. I must wait until we reach the pier, and then I'll make a dash, if they give me the least show. If Joe and Arthur write home about it, that will be the end of our trip, and I'll pick a quarrel with the pair of them as soon as I can find them."

But, after all, Roy did not borrow a great deal of trouble on this score. His friends had never yet "gone back on him," and Roy did not believe they would do it now, when there was so much at stake.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, the carriage, which had been driven at as high a rate of speed as the hackman thought he could venture upon without attracting the attention of the police, turned off the main thoroughfare into a narrow street, then into another, and finally into a third, which was so dark and gloomy that the street lamps looked as though they were shining

through a fog. Presently it came to a standstill.

"Here we are," said Babcock, with alacrity. "Jump out. Not that side, but this one. Aha! You'll bear watching, won't you?"

But Roy could not have made his exit through the door toward which he turned, without bringing on a useless struggle with his captors; for the minute the carriage stopped, the man Willis clambered down from the box and appeared at the window.

"Rowe Shelly must be a slippery fellow," thought Roy, as he faced about and followed the detective, "and no doubt he has given these two men a lesson that they will not soon forget. They won't let me have the ghost of a chance to run."

When Roy got out of the carriage he saw that it had stopped at the end of a pier which jutted out into the harbor for a hundred feet or more. There was no possible chance for escape, unless he were reckless enough to jump into the water and trust himself to the tide, which was running out at a rapid rate, but his captors were so very much afraid of him, that

they kept fast hold of both his arms while they marched him to the farther end of the pier, where they found a natty little yacht with steam up, ready for a start.

"Do you intend to take me away on this thing?" inquired Roy. "Well, before you do it, hadn't you better get a lantern and satisfy yourselves that you have made no mistake in the boy? I tell you I am not Rowe Shelly. If he has any good reason for running away from his uncle, I hope he is a thousand miles from here at this moment, and that you will never catch him. But if you don't quit fooling with me here and now, I'll make trouble for you as sure as I live to get ashore."

"I'm used to such talk as that," said Willis, with a laugh. "Yes," he added, in reply to a low question from a man on the forecastle who proved to be the captain of the yacht, "we've found him already. Had no trouble at all in tracking him. Are you ready? Then cast off and—"

"Hold on," interrupted the detective. "I want to say a few words to you in private, Willis. Captain, can this boy be locked in the

cabin with any certainty that we shall find him there when we want him?"

The man appealed to said he was sure of it; whereupon Roy was conducted down the companion ladder, and into an elegantly furnished little room in the stern of the yacht. The hanging lamp gave out a brilliant light, and Roy, believing that the detective would never have a better opportunity to take a good look at his face, placed his hands on his hips and stood in such a position that the rays from the reflector fell full upon him.

"Now what do you think?" said he. "Can you truthfully say that you ever saw me before?"

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Willis, while Roy was sure he looked somewhat concerned and anxious. "What are you talking about, Rowe? You don't pretend to deny yourself, do you? If that's your scheme, it won't work."

"Of course I do not mean to deny my identity," replied Roy. "But I do say I am not Rowe Shelly."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Willis.

"Shove off, captain. We are wasting time here. Mr. Babcock will go to the island with us, as he did before."

"Don't be in a hurry, captain," interposed the detective. "It is possible that I shall want to stay ashore. Now, Willis, come on deck and tell me who is to pay me for this night's work."

Willis knew, and so did Roy Sheldon, that this was simply a ruse on Babcock's part to take the superintendent out of the prisoner's hearing so that he could speak his mind to him without fear of being overheard. I afterward learned all about that rather stormy interview, and so I will tell of it here in its proper place.

"Look here," said Babcock, as soon as he and Willis had gained the deck. "You have brought me into a pretty mess, and I am going to get out of it with the least possible delay. I am as near the island as I am going to-night."

"You—you don't suppose—" began Willis.

"Yes; I mean to say that you have made me arrest the wrong boy," exclaimed the detective, as if he read the thoughts that were

passing in his companion's mind; "and if you don't know it, too, your face belies you. What do you say, captain? Who is that boy we just left in the cabin?"

"Why, it's Rowe Shelly, of course. Who else should it be?"

"Did you take a good look at him?"

"I did. I would know him if I had met him in Europe."

"There, now," said Willis, angrily, "I hope you're satisfied. I've heard that boy talk. He can almost make one believe that black is white, and I can see plain enough that he tried his blarney on you while you were in the carriage with him. You wouldn't have made the arrest if it hadn't been for me."

"You're right, I wouldn't. I believed you when you said you knew the boy, and now I've got into a nice pickle by it. I hope the colonel will give you your walking-papers the minute he hears of it."

"Oh, he dassent do that. I know too much about—" began Willis, and then he stopped, frightened at what he had said.

"You know too much about him and his

affairs, do you?" exclaimed Babcock, finishing the sentence for him. "That's what I have thought for a long time."

"I didn't say so," replied Willis, hastily, at the same time taking the detective by the arm and leading him out of earshot of the captain of the yacht. "You ought not to have spoken so plainly in the presence of a third party. I tell you it's all right."

"And I tell you I am sure it isn't. If you will take my advice, you will bring that boy out of the cabin and show him the way to his hotel at once. If he is a stranger in town he could not find his way there alone on a dark night like this."

"I wouldn't do that for no money," said Willis, alarmed at the mere mention of such a thing. "Just see the trouble I'd get into."

"You'll get into more if you don't do as I say. Well, good-by. I'm off."

"Won't you see Rowe safe to the island?"

"Not by a great sight. I'll have no more to do with the case."

So saying the detective jumped ashore, and Willis was left to his own discretion.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER SURPRISE FOR ROY.

"WELL, this is a pretty way to treat a fellow, I do think," soliloquized the puzzled and anxious superintendent, as he stood on the yacht's deck and watched the retreating form of the detective until it was swallowed up in the darkness. "He gets me into difficulty and then clears out, leaving me to sink or swim, he don't care which. What do you say, captain?" he added, turning to the master of the yacht, who came up when he saw Babcock spring ashore. "You're quite positive that the boy below is Rowe Shelly, and nobody else?"

"What's the matter with you and Babcook?" asked the captain, testily. "You act like a couple of—I don't know what."

"And that's the way I feel," replied Willis. "Babcock has been worked upon in some mys-

terious way, and now he's gone away and left me to bear the brunt of the whole thing alone."

"Well, wasn't that what you expected to do when you got back to the island?" inquired the captain. "His guardian being absent, you will have to take full charge of Rowe until he returns. That's what you did the last time he ran away, and you never made any fuss over it. I know it is disagreeable business, this standing guard over an uneasy fellow who won't stay where he is put, but seeing that we are well paid for it, and know that it is for the boy's best good, where's the harm?"

"But Babcock seems to think that Rowe has slipped through our fingers, and that we have brought back the wrong boy."

The captain made a gesture of impatience but said nothing.

"All right," exclaimed Willis. "Cast off the fasts and get under way as quickly as possible."

"Where's his wheel?" inquired the captain. "I didn't see you bring it aboard."

"We didn't stop for it," answered Willis, "for the youngster was in fighting humor, and would have drawn a crowd about us if we hadn't hustled him into the carriage just as we did. We'll have to send for it when he gets ready to tell us where he left it."

"Don't he feel inclined to talk? That isn't at all like Rowe, who usually has gab enough."

"Bless you, he's nothing but talk; but the trouble is, he won't tell the truth. He has hit upon a new plan this time. He says he is somebody else, and sticks to it. But you know him and I know him, even if Babcock doesn't; so it's all right. Now get under way. It *must* be all right, although I confess that Babcock frightened me by talking and acting as he did," said Willis, as the master of the yacht hastened forward to take his place at the wheel. "I had a good view of him while he stood in front of that window with those two young wheelmen; I sat almost within reach of him during the entire evening; and I've had several good looks at him since. Babcock had all the chances he wanted to compare his face with

the photograph I gave him, and he didn't think there was anything wrong until after Rowe had had opportunity to talk to him. I'd give something handsome to know what passed between them while I was on the box with the driver; then, perhaps I should know what to do. I ought to have stayed with them, but I never dreamed of anything like this. However, I shall be prepared for any emergencies. I'll take Tony into my confidence just as soon as I can get Rowe into the house and up to his room."

So saying, the superintendent faced about and went into the cabin to see what the prisoner thought of the situation. To his surprise he found him reading a paper he had taken from the table. According to Willis's way of thinking, that was a bad sign. Why didn't he walk the floor and shake his fists in the air and utter threats, and in various other ways act as if he had taken leave of his senses? That was the way he did the last time he was captured, and Willis could not understand why he didn't do so now.

"Well," said Roy, laying down his paper

and squaring around in his chair. "What conclusion did you and Babcock come to?"

"What conclusion?" repeated Willis, innocently.

"Yes. You went on deck to hold a private confab, and I should like to know what came of it. It is a matter in which I am somewhat interested."

"I don't see how you can be. Bab wanted to know who was to pay him for interfering with your plans, and I told him he would have to go to your uncle for that. There was nothing private about it."

"I suppose I am at liberty to believe that or not," replied Roy. "Babcock knows that when he caught me he didn't get the boy he wanted, and you know it, too. I don't say you knew it when you took me away from my friends in front of the hall, but you do now!"

Roy said this at a venture, and, no doubt, would have been greatly amazed if he had known just how close he had shot to the mark. He was sitting a little to one side of the reflector, so that the rays from the hanging lamp fell squarely upon him, and now that Willis

had leisure to look at him without fear of interruption from a crowd of curious by-standers, the cold chills began creeping over him. There was a wonderful resemblance, it is true, between the prisoner and Rowe Shelly, and yet Willis could not help seeing that they were different in a good many particulars. Roy had a way of holding his head, and even of sitting in his chair, which were unlike anything the superintendent had ever noticed in Rowe. How earnestly he wished that Roy would own up, confess that he was the runaway, and thus put an end to his suspense!

"Where's Babcock now?" asked Roy, after a short pause.

"On deck," answered Willis, who did not think it would be good policy to tell the prisoner just what had passed between himself and the detective. "It always makes him sea-sick to remain in a close cabin when on the water, and so he stayed where he could get the breeze."

"It works that way with me, too," said Roy; but Willis could not be made to believe it.

"It won't do, Rowe," said he, with some-

thing that was intended for a good-natured smile. "I've seen you on the water too often, and you can't crowd any such story down me. I wouldn't mind allowing you to go on deck if I could trust you; but I have learned that I can't. Your word isn't good for anything."

"Your remarks may apply to Rowe Shelly, but I want you to understand that they don't hit me. My word is always good. But what's the use of talking?" said Roy, again, picking up the paper. "I've told my story to the detective, who probably told it to you, and in a few hours you will learn that it is a true one. Where has Colonel Shelly gone, and when is he expected to return?"

Willis answered that he didn't know.

"It's immaterial," said Roy. "When my friends come to the island after me, as they surely will as soon as they find out where I have been taken, I shall go ashore with them, no matter whether the colonel is there or not."

It was right on the point of Roy's tongue to add: "And you will go also, for I don't intend to submit to treatment of this sort." But he did not utter the words. It came into his

mind like a flash, that possibly this man Willis might have it in his power to shut him up in some strong room on the island, and if that was the case Roy did not wish to make him angry.

"You still stick to it that you are not Rowe Shelly, do you?" exclaimed Willis, trying to look and speak as if he were becoming indignant, though the effort was a sorry failure. He was frightened, and Roy saw it plain enough. "You might as well give up, for everybody who has ever seen you knows who you are."

"Oh, I'll give up because I can't well help myself," replied Roy. "In fact I have a curiosity to see the thing out, and to know what you and Babcock will do when you find that you have put your feet in it. So long as I get good treatment, a soft bed to sleep in—I have been in the saddle nearly all day, and consequently I feel rather tired—and plenty to eat, I would just as soon—indeed, I would rather stay on an island to-night than sleep at my hotel. I never did like a city hotel, and if I were sure that my friends are not worrying

about me, my mind would be quite at rest. Hal-lo! What have I said now, I wonder."

"By the piper that played before Moses, that ain't Rowe Shelly," said Willis, to himself, as he sprang from his chair and bolted up the companion-ladder. "Babcock was right, and I'm in for it, sure enough. Rowe's got sublime cheek, but it can't compare with this fellow's. Now what shall I do?"

It was plain as daylight to me, when I heard of it, that there was but one course of action open to the superintendent, and that was the honest and manly one. When he became convinced, or even suspected, that he had made a blunder, the best thing he could do was to order the yacht back to the pier and conduct Roy Sheldon to his hotel with such apologies as he could think up on the spur of the moment. But, unfortunately, Willis had never been known to do an honest and manly thing. Probably he never thought of it. He wasn't above a mean act, and when detected in it generally did something meaner to cover it up. And that was what he decided to do in this case. He did not go into the cabin again, but paced the

deck, lost in thought. He turned over in his mind a dozen wild schemes for ridding himself of the prisoner in case he did not prove to be the boy he wanted, but through it all he clung to the hope that he was Rowe Shelly, and nobody else. It couldn't be possible, he told himself, that there was a boy in the world who looked enough like the runaway to deceive everybody at first sight. At any rate, it would not take long to settle the matter now, for here was the island close at hand. There were several people on the jetty awaiting the yacht's return, and every one of them would be able to tell at a glance whether or not he had brought Rowe Shelly with him.

"I'll not so much as drop a hint that I am afraid there is something wrong," said Willis, to himself. "I'll just walk him ashore as if it was all right, and leave them to find a difference between him and the runaway, if they can. If they don't say anything, I shall know that I have been a fool for allowing Babcock's words to have so much weight with me."

When the yacht whistled for the landing, Willis stuck his head down the companion-way

and told Roy he might come on deck; a privilege of which the weary prisoner was prompt to avail himself. He had been asleep, with his head resting on the table, and now all he cared for was to get to bed. It would be time enough, he thought, to look into his surroundings and inquire about Rowe Shelly and his reasons for leaving home, after he had had a good night's rest. But by the time the yacht was stopped at the jetty and the lines made fast and the gang-plank shoved out, he was wide awake.

"He's come," said somebody on the jetty. "Don't you see his white shirt and cap? That's him. That's Rowe."

"Now this is mighty strange," said Roy to himself. "These folks appear to be friendly to the boy I am supposed to be, and yet they don't want to have him run away, although he must have good reasons for it, having tried it twice. When they get a closer view of my face we'll see how quick they will sing another tune."

But, to Roy's surprise, they didn't do anything of the sort. They crowded about him,

as he walked down the staging by the superintendent's side (for a wonder the man did not take hold of his arm, as Roy expected him to do), all eager to shake him by the hand. They even gazed into his face, which was plainly visible, owing to the bright light emitted by the blazing torch that was standing among the rocks at the end of the jetty. The climax was reached when a motherly-looking woman, who was waiting for them at the shore end of the jetty, threw her arms around the neck of the startled boy and kissed him on the nose before he knew what she was going to do.

"Bless his heart, has he come back again?" she exclaimed, holding him off at arm's length so that she could get a good view of him. "Come right into the house and get a good supper before you go to bed. I know you must be tired to death, and don't suppose you have had a bite to eat since you went away, seeing that you did not take any money with you."

"Let us go in, Mrs. Moffat," interrupted Willis, who grew nervous when the housekeeper began talking about money.

"I'll tell you what's a fact: this is getting

serious," soliloquized Roy, as he moved toward the house in company with Willis and Mrs. Moffat, one walking on each side of him. "But I don't know that I care so very much. I'll see how it looks in the morning." Then aloud he said: "I don't want anything to eat, Mrs.—beg pardon, I didn't quite catch the name."

"Good laws! Just listen at the child," exclaimed the housekeeper, throwing up her hands and looking the picture of astonishment.

"He's been going on that way ever since we found him, Mrs. Moffat," said Willis in a low tone. "He don't know me nor Babcock nor the captain nor nobody. He acts as if he had lost all his senses."

"That's just what I have been afraid of for a long time," answered the housekeeper in a loud, shrill whisper. "No boy who was in his right mind would want to run away and leave a kind uncle and a beautiful home like this. I've suspected it, and so have others whose names I could mention."

Willis started when he heard this, and so did Roy. The woman's words suggested an idea to both of them.

"I've sense enough to know that I am not hungry," said Roy. "All I ask is to get to bed and be left alone for the rest of the night. I'm tired and sleepy; and besides, I want a chance to think about this business," he added, to himself.

The housekeeper hastened to assure him that it should be just as he said, and a few minutes later Roy was conducted up the front steps and into a wide hall from which winding stairs led to the floor above. Fortunately, his guides did not leave him here, for if they had, Roy would not have known what to do. No doubt he would have confirmed the housekeeper's suspicions by requesting her to show him to his room. But she and Willis did that without being asked. They led him upstairs to a handsomely furnished apartment, and even accompanied him into it. There was a student lamp on the center-table, a bright wood-fire burning in the grate (although it was summer, the breeze that came off the Sound was raw and chilly), and everything looked cheerful and inviting.

"I haven't touched the room since you went

away, except to slick it up a little," said Mrs. Moffatt. "Now, is there anything I can do for you before I say good-night? Hadn't you better let me bring up a little lunch for fear that you may get hungry before morning?"

"I don't care for any, because I never eat during the night. When I once fall asleep, I don't know anything more till daylight comes. There's nothing you can do, thank you," replied Roy.

The motherly housekeeper was evidently disappointed because the boy did not make some complaints or order something, for she lingered as if waiting for him to speak again, while Willis walked the floor with his hands behind his back. He was lost in a brown study from which he presently aroused himself to say:

"Very well. If there is nothing we can do for you, we'll bid you good-night. If you want anything you know how to get it."

"I'll be shot if I do," said Roy, mentally. "Rowe Shelly must be a queer chap if he has to be waited on during the night. If that's the way he has been brought up he had better stay at home as long as he can, for he'll

have to take hard knocks when he gets out into the world. I declare, he lives in clover, does he not?" added Roy, glancing around at the expensive furniture, the pictures on the walls, the ornaments on the mantel, which included the model of a full-rigged ship, and the well-filled book-cases that stood on each side of the fire-place. Through an open door at the farther end of the apartment, Roy caught a glimpse of the runaway's bed-room.

"But I'll not go in there," said he, to himself. "I'll move this sofa pillow to the lounge, borrow a book, if I can find one to suit me, and read myself to sleep. So long as I am treated like one of the masters of the house instead of an interloper, I don't see why I shouldn't make the best of the situation. Of course Joe and Art will be along in the morning, and they will be able to prove to Willis's satisfaction that I don't belong here. I knew it would be of no use to argue the matter with Mrs. Moffatt after Willis told her I was out of my head."

While Roy talked to himself in this way he ran his eye over the volumes in one of the

book-cases, took out "Gulliver's Travels," and lay down upon the lounge; but before he had read half a page the hand that held the book gradually fell away from his face until the volume rested on the floor by his side. There was no sham about his weariness. His thirty-six mile ride had tired every muscle in his body, and Roy was fast asleep. Would his slumber have been as peaceful as it was if he he had known what was going on outside the house?

When Roy awoke it was with a start and the indescribable feeling that sometimes comes over a sleeper when a stranger unexpectedly enters his room. He looked around, and sure enough he was not alone. Willis was standing a little distance away, and Roy was almost certain that he saw him turn and signal to another man, who whisked out of the door before he could obtain a fair view of him. It might have been nothing but the vagary of a dream, but still Roy thought it worth while to speak of it.

"What do you want now?" he demanded. "Why do you come in without awaking me,

and who was that fellow who just went out?"

"What fellow?" asked Willis, answering the last question first, and at the same time facing about and looking at the door, which was still slowly and softly closing.

"That's what I asked *you*," replied Roy, springing off the lounge, jerking the door wide open and looking out into the hall. There was no one there. If there had been Roy certainly would have seen him, for the lamps were still burning.

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Willis, as if he thought this a very strange proceeding on Roy's part. "What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know that I am afraid of anything; but I'd like to have you to tell me who came into this room with you, and why you are here. I told you I shouldn't want anything to-night."

"I thought you might, and that's why I came," replied the man. "There is no one with me. I am alone." And then, as if he had just thought of the object of his visit, he continued: "I was sure you would like to

hear some word from your friends—the two who were with you when that bunco-steerer tried to cheat you out of some money. I know I might have waited until morning, and since you were sleeping so soundly, I am sorry I didn't. I have found out—"

"Great Scott, man!" interrupted Roy, who could scarcely believe that he heard aright. "Don't talk about waiting till morning when you have good news to tell. Where are my friends? Are they here—on the island? How did you get word from them? Go on, please, and tell me what you have found out."

If Willis had not already received as good evidence as he wanted that the boy before him was not Rowe Shelly, he had it now. The real runaway could not have talked and acted as Roy did at that moment.

"I heard of them through Babcock," Willis began.

"Then he didn't come to the island with us, did he? I wondered why I did not see him."

"No. He left me at the pier and went to the city to make inquiries about you. He went straight to the—the—"

"Lafayette House," prompted Roy, when the man hesitated.

"That's the place. The Lafayette House, and saw your name on the register. Let me see; what did he say it was?"

"Was it Roy Sheldon?"

"Yes, it was. Sounds a good deal like Rowe Shelly, don't it? He found your name there, and also the names of—"

Here Willis hesitated again, for he was not quite sure of his ground. You must remember that he did not know as much about the prisoner as Babcock did, for Roy had not had the same chance to talk to him. So he stopped as often as he needed posting, and, strange to say, Roy never suspected that there was anything wrong. He afterward had occasion to take himself to task for his stupidity.

"My two friends, Joe Wayring and Arthur Hastings?" again prompted Roy. "Did Babcock see them, and what did they have to say about my disappearance? I hope they haven't thought of writing home about it. I wouldn't have them do that for anything."

This was something that Roy ought to have

kept to himself; but he said it, and Willis was quick to make a note of it.

"I don't know about that," he replied. "Babcock didn't see 'em to speak to 'em, and they didn't come off with him."

"Now—why didn't they?" exclaimed the disappointed Roy, who had secretly cherished the hope that the fellow who so suddenly disappeared through the door was one of his chums. It would have been just like Art Hastings to play a trick of that kind on him.

"I'll tell you why he didn't speak to—what's their names?" answered Willis. "He spoke to the clerk instead, because he did not want to raise a row, and he told him all about you."

"The clerk did?" said Roy. "Why, he doesn't know anything about me. He never saw me until I went into his hotel in company with my friends."

"That's what he told Bab; but he knew you were from—what is the name of that place again?"

"Mount Airy?"

"That's it. He knew you came from there, and more than that, he saw the genuine Rowe Shelly."

"There, now," cried Roy. "That's evidence worth having. Did he catch him?"

"No; but he is close on his trail. He brought this news over to me just now, Babcock did, and then went back to follow him up."

"I hope he'll not catch him," said Roy. "I'm sure I can't understand why a boy as well fixed and as kindly treated as young Shelly seems to be should want to run away from home, but I suppose he has good reasons for it."

"Not the first; not the smallest shadow of a reason," protested Willis.

"Then he's crazy; that's flat."

"Now you have hit it. That's what's the matter with him, and you heard Mrs. Moffatt say she had suspected it for a long time. You look surprisingly like Rowe, or else all those folks who met us on the jetty wouldn't have taken you for him. You've got the same hair, eyes, and mustache, and your clothes are ex-

actly like his; but when I had a chance to exchange a word with you, I knew that Bab had made a big mistake."

"Bab says you are the one who made the mistake, and that if I blame anybody for what has happened to me to-night, I must blame you."

"Well, you wouldn't blame anybody if you could see Rowe Shelly," said Willis, deprecatingly. "Of course any amends that—"

"Oh, I don't ask any amends," interposed Roy. "I've had an agreeable adventure, and I shall not make any trouble on account of it. All I ask is that you will send me to the city at once, so that I may relieve the anxiety of my friends. Now, what do you want me to do? Are you going to send me off in the yacht?"

"I'd like to, but I can't," answered Willis. "The captain's asleep, and steam has gone down, so that it would take an hour to get ready for the start. I'll have to send you ashore in a boat, if you don't mind going that way."

"Any way to get there," said Roy, picking up his cap. "I'm ready if you are."

Willis left the room at once, and Roy followed him downstairs and out of the house. Did the man move with cautious footsteps as if he were afraid of disturbing somebody? Roy was sure he did, and thought it looked suspicious.

CHAPTER VII.

SOME STARTLING NEWS.

"I DON'T much like the idea of sneaking out as if I were a thief," said Roy, involuntarily following the guide's motions and speaking in a low and guarded tone. "What's the object of so much secrecy? I know I have no right here, but since I was brought against my will, I have a perfect right to go out open and above board."

"Easy, easy," whispered Willis, raising his hand with a warning gesture. "We don't want to disturb Mrs. Moffatt for nothing. The timid old soul lives in constant fear of a visit from New London burglars, and if we should wake her up she would be scared to death."

Roy did not think to ask himself whether or not this was a good reason for Willis's stealthy movements, for his mind was too busy

with other matters. He wanted to see the boat that was to take him across to the city, and fervently hoped it might prove to be a large and seaworthy one; for when he got out of the house he saw that the sky was overcast, that the wind was rising, and that the surface of the bay looked dark and threatening.

"Isn't it going to be an ugly night?" said he, as he accompanied his guide down one of the broad carriageways that had been laid out along the beach. "What a lovely road for a wheel," he went on, without giving Willis a chance to reply. "It is as hard as rock and level as a floor."

"Yes; here's where Rowe learned to ride," said Willis. "We have twenty miles of just such roads on the island."

"Then that was what you meant when you said Rowe's clothes were just like mine; he is a wheelman," said Roy. "He has a nice place for his regular runs, and I should much like to see it by daylight; but I should think he would get lonely and long to take a spin on the mainland now and then. I tell you it's going to blow," he added, as a strong gust of wind

shook the branches of the trees that shaded the road on both sides. "Are you going to the city with me?"

"I can't leave the island until I put the hands to work in the morning," replied Willis. "But I will give you a good crew and a stanch boat. You'll go over all right. You are not afraid of a capful of wind, I hope?"

"No, but I am afraid of a gale. I am used to smooth water, and don't at all relish the idea of being out in a storm."

"Oh, it isn't going to storm. But if you get frightened after you are out a little way, tell the men to bring you back or to put you aboard some coaster, bound in. Here we are."

As Willis said this he turned off the road and led the way down the bank and to the beach, where Roy found a boat and two men who were evidently waiting for him.

"Here he is." said Willis, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder. "He doesn't much like the idea of going out in this breeze—"

"The breeze don't blow to hurt anything," growled one of the men, pulling his sou'wester

lower over his forehead and turning the collar of his pea-jacket up around his ears.

"That's what I told him; but of course his wishes must be respected, and I want you to mind this: If it gets too heavy for you, you will either bring him back, or put him aboard some larger craft, bound in. If you will step this way a minute, Tony, I will give you an order for some goods I want brought from the city."

The superintendent drew off on one side out of earshot, and one of the muffled figures followed him.

"Me and Bob hain't yet made up our minds whether we'll have a hand in this business or not," said he, in a hoarse whisper. "Looks most too risky, don't it?"

"There isn't a particle of risk about it," replied Willis. "Do you think I would put the colonel's nephew in danger for the sake of a paltry five hundred dollars? I tell you, there's nothing to fear. The colonel told me to attend to this business for him, and when he finds I've not done it, what shall I say to him? Do you want me to tell him that you

wouldn't obey orders because you were afraid?"

"Well, I am afraid, and that's flat," said Tony, doggedly. "I have heared of Cap'n Jack, and I'm scared to trust myself on board his ship."

"You needn't be, for the colonel will protect you. Give him this the minute you get aboard, and it will see you through," said Willis, slipping an envelope into the pocket of Tony's pea-jacket. "Now, hurry up, for the captain is in a great taking to go to sea, and he's liable to run out at any moment. He's been waiting a long time—"

"He's been waiting long enough to get good and mad, and I wouldn't be one of the crew he takes to sea with him this trip for all the money there is in the broad world," said Tony, with a shudder. "He'll haze 'em till they'll be glad to jump overboard."

"You and I have nothing whatever to do with the way Captain Jack Rowan sees fit to treat his crew," said Willis impatiently. "All you and Bob have to do is to set this boy on board the White Squall, so that he can get

that money. But mind you: You are not to tell him where you are going. He's as much afraid of the White Squall as you seem to be, and wouldn't put a foot over her rail if he knew it. He thinks he going into the city, and that you are to take him straight to a hack-stand. Say yes or no, and be quick about it. The wind is rising every moment, and if you don't start pretty soon you'll not be able to get away from the beach."

"All right, Mr. Willis. We'll tend to the business for you."

Tony spoke these words in a tone loud enough to reach the ears of Roy Sheldon, who remained near the boat in company with the man Bob. The former supposed the words had something to do with the "order" of which Willis had spoken, but Bob knew they were intended to convey to him the information that the job on hand was to be carried out just as it had been planned.

"Jump aboard, lad," said he, motioning Roy to get into the boat. "Holler good-by to the old man, and that will do just as well as shaking hands with him."

But Roy had no opportunity to "holler" his farewell, even if he had thought of it; for by the time the boat was fairly afloat, the crew in their places, and the oars shipped, the thick darkness of the on-coming storm closed down over them, and the beach was shut out from view.

"I reckon that's the last of this scrape for one while," soliloquized Willis, as he pulled his hat down over his ears and retraced his steps to the house. "If there ever were two born fools in the world, they are me and Babcock. How we managed to make such a blunder, I can't for the life of me imagine. Now Rowe Shelly can cut his lucky and go and find his father and mother, for all me. I'll never try to catch him, for my cue now is to make folks believe I've had him here, and that he gave me the slip and cleared out. Is that you, Benny? You don't know how you startled me."

Just then some one stepped out into the road and confronted the superintendent. It was his son; and all I know about him is that he was called "a chip of the old block," so he must have been a rascal. The first words the

young man spoke proved that this was not the first interview they had had that night.

"Well, how is it?" said he.

"They've gone," replied his father shortly.

"Then we've seen them for the last time; for when they get back we'll not be here. Captain Jack will be sure to carry them off with him."

"Ain't you kinder sorry to treat Tony and Bob that way? They've been good, faithful fellows, and I hate to think of their being kicked and knocked about by those mates."

"They're used to it," replied Benny indifferently. "Besides, what else could you do? You couldn't keep the boy, for he was not Rowe Shelly; and if you had let him go, he would have had the law on you for abduction. You couldn't have hired Bob and Tony to take him aboard the White Squall and leave him there, because they wouldn't have done it, and they would have blabbed about it into the bargain. By doing as I said, you've got rid of the whole of them at once, and they'll never come back to trouble you."

The superintendent groaned

"I know what you're afraid of," continued Benny. "You're scared that the ship will go to the bottom with all hands. Well, then, what made you be such a dunce as to capture the wrong boy? You got into the scrape and you had to get out, didn't you? Now I'm going to bed."

"There's going to be the biggest kind of a commotion on this island, and before long, too," said Willis dolefully. "I have warning of it in every breath of wind that comes off the bay."

I do not suppose that Willis closed his eyes in slumber that night. It would have been a wonder if he had slept, with so guilty a conscience for company. He arose at an early hour, saw the yacht when she put off through the white-caps shortly after daylight to bring the morning's mail from the city, and waited with what patience he could for her return. She did not bring any of Roy Sheldon's friends with her, but she landed a larger supply of mail than usual, and in it the superintendent found a letter addressed to himself in Rowe Shelly's well-known handwriting.

Its contents were enough to drive one frantic, Willis told himself. He had hoped that the runaway would be satisfied now that he had got off the island, and that he would quietly disappear and never "turn up" again; but here he was threatening the superintendent with the terrors of the law if he did not at once release the boy who had been mistaken for himself.

"Somebody put him up to that," groaned Willis, "for Rowe never would have thought of such a thing himself. I wish I *could* send that boy back where he belongs, and if I had ever dreamed of this, I would have done it. I made a mistake in taking Benny's advice and sending Roy Sheldon away to be "shanghaed," for instead of getting out of trouble, I have only pulled myself deeper into it. What is it, Jobson?" he added, addressing himself to one of the hired men who just then appeared at the door.

"I came in to see if you could tell me anything about Tony and Bob Bradley," was the reply; and the words added big weight to the superintendent's heavy load of anxiety.

"They are not on the island, and a boat that looks wonderfully like theirs is being driven ashore from the Sound. I didn't know but you might have sent them to the city for something."

"In all that storm?" exclaimed Willis. "Say, Jobson," he continued, changing the subject, for it was one he did not like to dwell upon, "was the storm so very hard? I mean, was it severe enough to keep vessels from going and coming?"

"Oh, no. I see the White Squall has left her anchorage. She must have gone out in the height of it, for she was there when I went to bed."

"If those two men went away last night they did it without any orders from me," said Willis. "It's nothing to worry over. No doubt they will come around presently. So the White Squall has gone at last!" he added, as Jobson left to continue his search for Bob and Tony. "She has been anchored out there in the bay for more than two weeks, waiting for a chance to drug and steal a crew, and if she has sailed, that interloper must

have sailed with her. In that case it will be a long time before he shows up again, for he'll not touch land this side of Cape Town. This is too damaging a thing to lay around loose, so I will chuck it in there," he added, tossing Rowe's letter into the grate. "Those people from the city will be along in the course of an hour or so, and I know what I am going to say to them. Now, why doesn't Mrs. Moffatt come in and tell me that Rowe has run away again?"

Willis picked up one of the papers which the yacht had brought from the city, and the minute it was opened his eye fell upon this startling paragraph:

"MUTINY IN THE HARBOR.

AN INFAMOUS VESSEL AND A REBELLIOUS CREW.—A SAILOR PREFERS DEATH TO A VOYAGE IN THE WHITE SQUALL.

"Pilot-boat No. 29, Caleb Rogers master, which was driven into the harbor by the gale, reports a suicide committed under peculiarly distressing circumstance. When off the light-ship bound in, Captain Rogers passed the White Squall going out. As the readers of

The Tribune have often been told, this interesting ship had lain at anchor in the outer bay for nearly three weeks, waiting for a crew; but no man who sails out of this port, so long as he kept a level head on his shoulders, could be induced to affix his name to her shipping articles. Now and then a few foreigners, under promise of big pay, plenty to eat and kind treatment, have been coaxed aboard of her, but they always deserted when they found out where they were and who the captain was. With the aid of shipping agents, or in some other underhanded way, the captain at last succeeded in mustering crew enough to handle his vessel, and this morning she went out in the teeth of the storm that forced Captain Rogers to seek shelter. When off the light-ship a man was seen to spring upon her rail and deliberately throw himself into the water. At the same time a white fishing-boat was cut loose from her starboard quarter, and the wind blew it out of sight. This, Captain Rogers thinks, made it evident that the crew had laid their plans to desert in a body, and that the plot was discovered and thwarted by the officers. Captain Rogers at once rounded to, lowered a boat, and made diligent search for the poor fellow who preferred to die rather than trust himself to the tender mercies of

Captain Jack Rowan and his brutal mates, but he must have sunk immediately, for he was not seen after striking the water. At certain stages of the tide, heavy vessels like the White Squall are obliged to pass quite close to the ledge that bounds the northern side of the channel, and in ordinary weather a fair swimmer might succeed in reaching the lightship; but under the circumstances Captain Rogers thinks there was no chance for this unfortunate man's life. The White Squall kept on her way without making the least effort to pick him up. Now what is the use of having any law, we should like to know, if it is not intended to reach just such ruffians as this Captain Jack and his officers? If that sailor made way with himself in his desperate efforts to escape their brutality, they ought to be punished with the utmost severity."

Willis read this paragraph with eyes that seemed ready to start from their sockets, and long before he finished the paper was shaking so violently in his hands that the noise it made could have been heard across the room. He understood some portions of the paragraph as well as though he had stood upon the White Squall's deck and witnessed the thrilling

scenes that must have taken place there before that unhappy sailor gave himself up to the mercy of the waves. But was it a *sailor* who jumped overboard? Might it not have been some one else? How did he know but it was—The exclamations that fell from the superintendent's lips when this thought came into his mind can not be expressed in words, for I do not know how to spell them.

"Benny's plan worked too well," said Willis, throwing down the paper and getting upon his feet. "Why didn't he stay here and see me through, instead of going off in the yacht the first thing in the morning? They were all shanghaied, as we meant they should be; but was there any one in the white fishing-boat that was cast adrift from the ship and which Jobson says is now coming toward the island? And who was the fellow who jumped overboard? That is a question that will haunt me till I go ashore and learn the truth. I do not think Tony or Bob would do a thing like that, for they are used to hard treatment at the hands of shipmasters; and if it was Roy—

Gracious Peter! I'm in a worse scrape than I thought."

Willis did not have time to follow out this train of thought, for just then Mrs. Moffat came into the room. The man knew well enough what she was going to say, for the look of anxiety her face wore could be easily interpreted.

"Good morning, Mr. Willis," said she, with a sorry attempt to appear as cheerful as usual. "Have you seen Rowe since we left him in his room last night?"

"I have not," replied the superintendent, resuming his seat and once more unfolding the paper. "What makes you ask?"

"Why, I went up just now to tell him breakfast would soon be ready, and he wasn't there," answered the housekeeper. "More than that, his bed was not slept in."

"That doesn't signify. He took to the lounge probably, and went out before any of us were up for his usual morning's spin on his wheel."

"But he took his wheel when he went to the

city, and you did not bring it back," Mrs. Moffatt reminded him.

"That's so. I had forgotten about it. I'll send for it as soon as he is ready to tell me where he left it. Then he took his pony."

"The pony hasn't been out this morning. The hostler told me so. Mr. Willis," said the housekeeper, becoming earnest, "I'm afraid he's gone."

"Again?" exclaimed Willis, as if the thought had just been suggested to him. "Why, we only brought him back last night."

"I can't help that. I don't believe he is on the island."

The man knew he must make a stir about it, for any lukewarmness or show of indifference on his part would be reported when the colonel returned, and Willis was not yet ready to give up his lucrative position. He wanted to make a little more money out of it first. So he hurried from the house, making a great show of nervousness and apprehension; and every man he met he sent off to make inquiries about Rowe Shelly.

"If he has run away again I shall surely think he is out of his head," he took occasion to remark, in Mrs. Moffatt's hearing. "He couldn't go back to the city without crossing the bay, and no boy, or man either, would think of trying that in such a gale as we had last night and this morning, unless he was clean gone crazy. Have you brought any news, Jobson?"

"The little I've got is bad enough," replied the hired man. "The boat I was telling you about a while ago has come ashore down there in the cove—"

"And there's nobody in it," exclaimed the superintendent. "Mrs. Moffatt, I fear the worst. Rowe tried to reach the city in that boat, and the storm capsized him. I am afraid we shall never see him again."

"If Rowe went off in that boat Bob and Tony must have gone with him," said Jobson, "for they ain't either one of them to be found on the island, and their folks don't know anything about them."

"Do you think it possible that Rowe could have bribed them to take him across to the

mainland?" said Willis anxiously. "If he did, then they have all gone to their death."

"How could he have bribed anybody when he had no money?" cried Mrs. Moffatt.

"Madam," replied the superintendent impressively, "he had money, and plenty of it, too."

"When and how did he get it?"

"You tell. All I know is, that every dollar of the funds the colonel left in my hands to pay expenses during his absence has disappeared."

"I don't care if it is," snapped the housekeeper. "Rowe Shelly never took it. He isn't capable of such a thing."

To an inexperienced rascal it would have seemed as though the situation was about as bad as it could be, and even Willis trembled when he tried to look far enough into the future to see what the outcome was likely to be. But, as it happened, he was saved from the consequences of his folly and wickedness (for the present, at least), by one of those unexpected freaks of fortune that sometimes happen in this world. He did not want to talk about the stolen money, especially to a person

as sharp of tongue and as firmly convinced of Rowe's innocence as Mrs. Moffatt was, so he sent word to the captain of the yacht to get ready for an immediate return to the city, and hastened to his room. His first care was to make some important changes in his wearing apparel, and his second to hide the morning papers and take possession of a well-filled pocketbook he found in his bureau.

"I don't know as there is any sense in putting those papers out of Mrs. Moffatt's sight," said he to himself, "but somehow I don't want her to see the account of that suicide until I am away from here and out of reach of her tongue. I thought, by the way she looked at me, that she rather suspected me of stealing that money; and didn't Rowe say in his letter that if there was any money gone, he'd sooner think I took it than accuse anybody else? Well, here it is, and more besides, and into my pocket it goes. It sort of runs in my head that I am going to see and hear something before I get back; and if it should be anything unpleasant, I shall be prepared to take the train."

Having arranged things so that he could run or stay, as circumstances seemed to require, Willis hurried to the jetty and ordered the captain of the yacht to shove off. Of course the strange events that had taken place on board the White Squall were in the mouths of all the yacht's crew, for they had heard all about them during their first trip to the city, and besides they had read the *Tribune*. Wherever Willis went, into the pilot-house, the engine-room, or on the forecastle, he was sure to hear them discussed; and after repeatedly declaring that he didn't know anything about them, and that he was going to New London to see if he could learn any additional particulars, Willis finally retreated to the cabin and tried to interest himself in a paper.

What it was that induced him to jump ashore the minute the yacht landed, and draw a bee-line for the Lafayette House, the superintendent could not have told. But he went, as if impelled by some impulse he could not resist, and the first person he saw when he entered the reading-room was the very one he did not want to see. It was Roy Sheldon.

He wore a bandage over one eye, the other was slightly discolored, and Willis noticed that when he moved his right arm he did it with some difficulty. It had evidently been injured in some way. He had on different clothes, a dress suit, in fact, consisting of blue broadcloth knickerbockers and shirt, black silk stockings, low shoes, and new white helmet. If Willis had never seen him before, he would have rushed up and called him Rowe Shelly; but he knew it wasn't Rowe. He took just one glance at him, then wheeled about to retire without attracting his notice, when Roy, who was impatiently waiting for Joe and Arthur, looked up and saw him. In an instant he was on his feet and coming toward the man, who could not retreat. Roy had but to say a word to bring in the policeman who was standing in front of the hotel. But, to the superintendent's great surprise, he did not say it. On the contrary he held out his hand, and even tried to smile. What in the world did it mean? Willis asked himself.

"Good-morning," said Roy, in cheery tones. "I made it, as you see, but I had a tight

squeak for it. Say! I am sorry for Tony and his friend. The waves and wind got so heavy they couldn't make headway against them; they dared not round to and go back to the island for fear of a capsize, so they hailed a ship that was getting under way. We supposed that she was going to pull farther into the harbor for shelter; in fact, one of her officers told us so. But, by gracious! the minute we got aboard what did that scoundrel of a captain do but—Sit down, and I will tell you all about it. It's a little ahead of anything I ever heard of. Seen this morning's *Tribune?*"

"No; that is to say, yes. I've seen the *Tribune*, but no other paper," replied Willis, who was so astounded that he hardly knew what he said.

"Then, of course, you know about the poor sailor-man who preferred death to a voyage in the White Squall," continued Roy. "Well, there wasn't any suicide. The fellow who deliberately threw himself into the water was I; and I tell you—Why don't you sit down? I'm as lame as though I had been pounded with a club, although I know I was struck only twice,

once in each eye, and almost had my arm jerked out of place. I can't stand long at a time."

Willis mechanically seated himself and listened like one in a dream, while Roy related the following story of his adventure.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON BOARD THE WHITE SQUALL.

"JUST one word before you begin your story," said Willis, who was not entirely satisfied with Roy's friendly speech and manner, believing, as he did, that the boy might have some sinister object in view. He was afraid to trust anybody, knowing full well that he could not be trusted himself.

"As many words as you please," replied Roy, resuming his seat and placing his injured arm in a comfortable position on the table at his side. "I told the clerk when I first came back that I wouldn't be interviewed; but I know he has sent three reporters after me. All they learned didn't do them much good. You see I don't want my name to appear in the papers, for my folks would be sure to see it; then good-by to all my fine plans for the summer. Of course you'll not say a word."

"Not I," replied Willis. "I don't want

everybody to know what fools Babcock and I made of ourselves. By the way, have you seen Bab this morning?"

Roy said he hadn't.

"That's all right," said Willis to himself; and he was so immensely relieved that he could scarcely keep still in his seat. "Then of course you don't know that I didn't tell you the truth when I said Bab had warned me that you were not Rowe Shelly. That's *all* right. Now, how much does this boy know or suspect, I wonder?" Then aloud he added: "I am sorry you haven't seen Bab, for he would show you a photograph of Rowe Shelly he has in his possession; and after you had taken one look at it, you would see how we came to mistake you for our runaway. I hope you don't bear me any ill-will for—"

"Of course I don't," interrupted Roy. "I don't feel hard toward you or Babcock either. I came within an ace of losing my life (I don't see how I managed to save it, having never swum a stroke in so rough water before), but here I am, safe if not sound, and all's well that ends well."

"You and Rowe are as much alike as two peas," began Willis.

"I can easily believe that, for when I walked up to the desk the clerk began asking me questions I couldn't understand; but I can see the drift of some of them now, for those three reporters have been at me since then, and I know Rowe Shelly was here in this hotel last night, and that he went somewhere on a steamer. When I came in all bunged up, the clerk wanted to know if the boat had burst her boiler."

"Which way did Rowe go?" asked Willis, who was deeply interested.

"I don't know, and you wouldn't expect me to tell you if I did, would you? I have seen how nicely he is fixed over there on the island, and I am sure that if there wasn't some good reason for it, he would never leave a home like that and go out among strangers."

"He might if he was crazy," suggested Willis.

"And where's the boy who would not go crazy after years of solitary confinement, no matter if his prison was furnished like a pal-

ace?" exclaimed Roy. "I'll bet you that you could not keep me shut up in any such place as that. I would find some way to open communication with a lawyer, who would call upon that uncle of mine to show cause for detaining me against my will."

"I believe you would," thought Willis, who, as he gazed into the boy's flashing eyes, told himself that money would not tempt him to take charge of such a prisoner as Roy would be likely to prove. He knew too much, was altogether too wide-awake, and the desperate measures he had adopted to escape from the White Squall, after he had been fairly kidnapped, showed that he was by no means lacking in courage.

Willis wondered if any of those rebellious ideas had been put into Rowe Shelly's head since he ran away. If so, the next time his guardian saw him he would probably have an attorney at his back, and then there would be fun on the island. Willis really wanted information on this point, and while he was wondering how he could get it without asking questions that might excite Roy's suspicions,

the matter was settled in a most unexpected way. All on a sudden Roy staggered to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and pleasure on his lips, and darted forward to fall into the arms of two new-comers, namely Arthur Hastings and Joe Wayring.

"Where have you been?" said Roy, as soon as he could speak. "I have waited and watched for the last seven hours, and you don't know how lonely I have been without you."

"Haw!" laughed Joe. "We haven't been gone from the hotel more than an hour, and you were not here when we went away."

"We've been up on Bank Street to call upon Mr. Wilcox," replied Arthur, with a sidelong glance at Willis. "Where have *you* been to get mussed up in this way? You are a nice looking specimen, I must say. Who's been at you?"

"I can't let everything out at once, so you must ask your questions one at a time," said Roy, motioning to his chums to seat themselves. "In the first place, this is Mr. Willis, Colonel Shelly's superintendent. My two

friends, Joe Wayring and Arthur Hastings, Mr. Willis."

To Roy's great surprise his companions did not seem particularly pleased to make the acquaintance of Mr. Willis. They nodded, bnt did not offer to shake hands with him.

"Babcock has made his report and told everything just as it happened," said Arthur. "We have seen him, and he says he never would have made the mistake he did if Willis had not insisted that you were the boy they were looking for."

"Then Babcock told you what wasn't so," exclaimed Willis.

"That's what he told us, anyhow," said Joe. "He's outside now waiting for us, and you can speak to him about it, if you want to."

"Waiting for you?" repeated Roy. "Where are you going?"

"We intended to hire a tug and go over to the island after you," answered Arthur.

"But you see there's no need of it, don't you? Mr. Willis attended to that as soon as he became satisfied that I wasn't Rowe Shelly."

"Ah! That puts a different look on the matter," said Joe. "But where did you get those black eyes if you didn't get them while escaping from the island?"

"I got them on the White Squall," replied Roy, "and that brings me to the story I was getting ready to tell Mr. Willis when you came in. But before I begin, go out and ask that detective to come here. I should like to see the photograph he's got in his pocket. I am told it looks just like me."

"And so it does, at first glance," said Arthur, rising from his seat. "But the more one gazes upon it, the less it looks like you. You shall see for yourself."

"Let me go after Babcock, please," Willis interposed, "and you stay here and talk to your friends. I will bring him right in."

There was nothing strange in this proposition, so Arthur sat down again, while Willis went out to make things straight with the detective. He didn't want him to come into Roy's presence until he had opportunity to post him.

"So that's the scamp who got you into so

much trouble, is it?" said Arthur, in tones of disgust. "We meant to have him arrested if he didn't talk pretty smoothly to us, and yet we find you and him here as thick as a couple of thieves."

"Now, what's the sense in going on like that?" demanded Roy. "If I am satisfied with his story, I'm sure you ought to be. Willis is all right. The minute he learned that I wasn't Rowe Shelly, he woke me up in the middle of the night, put me into a boat with two good men to row it, and sent me over to the city. He was as anxious to be rid of me as I was to find you. Now see if you can't treat him decently when he comes back."

How Willis would have hugged himself if he could have heard Roy Sheldon say this! There was not the faintest suspicion in the boy's mind that the superintendent had been guilty of treachery, and that he had sent him on board the White Squall intending that he should be "shanghaied" and carried so far away from America that he would not get back for six months or a year. If Roy had mistrusted that there was anything wrong, his

fears on that score would have vanished when he saw Bob and Tony driven forward to do duty before the mast, and their boat given up to the mercy of the waves. He thought they had unwittingly brought themselves and him into serious trouble. That was all there was of it.

I never heard just how Willis went to work to put himself on a friendly footing with the detective, but my impression is that he told him the whole truth, and offered Babcock a bonus if he would back up anything he might say in the hearing of Roy and his friends. At all events that was what the detective did. When he entered the reading-room he took a photograph from his pocket, and after spending a minute or two in comparing it with the face of the boy before him, he stepped up and handed it to Roy.

"So that's the way I look when I haven't a black eye and a lame arm, is it?" said the latter, as his gaze rested on the picture. "I know something now I never knew before."

"What is it?" asked Joe.

"That I am the handsomest and most

stylish looking chap in our party," replied Roy.

"We haven't time for any more nonsense of that sort," said Arthur. "Mr. Babcock, our missing friend has turned up, as you see, and so we shall not be obliged to go to the island. How much do we owe you?"

"Not a red cent," said the detective, who was glad indeed that his mistake and Willis's seemed in a fair way to straighten itself out, and that he wasn't going to get into difficulty through the blunder he had made the night before. "I am heartily sorry that I caused you and your friend so much trouble and anxiety."

"But he did his best to undo it," chimed in Willis. "He went over to the island and told me to set the boy ashore as soon as I could, and give him a guide to show him to his hotel, and that was the way I came to send him off in the boat that was caught in the storm. I might have waited until morning, but Roy wouldn't hear of it."

"Of course not," assented Roy. "I wanted to see my friends and relieve their suspense."

"I guess we have asked questions enough for the present," said Arthur, who was impatient to know how Roy came to have those black eyes, "and now we'd like to have you tell us why you didn't come ashore in better shape, when you had a boat and two good men to manage it for you."

Roy's story was none the less interesting because it had been so long delayed. I have told you how he left the island without opportunity to shout his adieu to the superintendent, even if he had thought of it; but he didn't. The waves made a fearful noise as they broke upon the beach, and came with such force that Bob and Tony were obliged to wade in until the water reached to their waists before they could launch the boat and ship the oars. By the time this had been done, darkness closed down upon them and shut the island from view.

When they got out from under the cliffs where the wind had a fair sweep, the way the boat began to pitch and toss about was alarming, and Roy lived in momentary expectation of seeing her come about and start back

for the island. But he was a canoeist instead of a deep-water sailor, and perhaps that was the reason he was frightened. For he was frightened, as he was afterwards free to confess; more so than he would have been if he could have had a hand in the management of the boat. But there were only two oars, and no rudder to steer by, and all Roy could do was to sit still in the stern-sheets and wish the trip was at an end.

"What are you holding so far to the right for?" Roy demanded at length, shouting at the top of his voice in order to make himself heard. "The city is off there, more to the left."

"There's a hack-stand where we are headin' for," came a hoarse voice, in reply, "and there you can get a carriage to take you straight to your hotel. More'n that, we dassent run afore the waves with only two oars, for fear that one of 'em will come in over the starn an' sink us. We have to run kinder criss-cross of 'em."

"But you don't take them quartering," protested Roy. "You are holding so that they

strike almost broadside. I'd rather you'd round to and go back. That's what Mr. Willis told you to do in case you found the wind and sea too heavy for you."

"I'd like mighty well to do it," Tony made answer, "but I dassent. Now that we've got this fur, we've got to go on. If we should turn around the sea would come pourin' in over the side an' take all hands to the bottom afore you could say 'hard-a-starboard' with your mouth open. Do you see that bright light dead ahead? Well, there's where the pier is, if we can keep afloat till we get there."

Roy may have been mistaken, but he was positive he heard the man add, in a lower tone, as if the words were intended only for his companion's ears:

"Cap'n Jack must be a-lookin' for a crew to-night, else he wouldn't have that light out so open and suspicious like. Well, it's the best kind of a night for that sort of work, but I'm sorry for the poor chaps he gets."

The next time Tony faced about on his seat to make sure of the course he was pursuing, the bright light had disappeared; and when the

wind lulled for a moment, the faint clanking of a capstan came to his ears. The sound seemed to nerve him and Bob to greater exertion.

"Pull, ye rascal," shouted Tony, so that Roy could hear it. "It's comin' harder every blessed minute, an' the wind an' tide together is takin' us out to sea as fast as they can. Pull, why don't ye? Do you see a ship or a coaster anywheres, I don't know? If you do, sing out an' ask 'em can we come aboard of her till the wind dies down a bit."

"Look out!" yelled Roy, as something black and huge loomed out of the darkness directly in their course. "We're running into a block of houses."

But it was a heavy ship that barred their way, as Roy found when they got a little closer to her. She was weighing anchor, and the clanking of the capstan came from her forecastle.

"On deck there!" shouted Tony. "Goin' to change your berth, or what you goin' to do?"

Sóme answer came back, but, although the

words were plain enough, Roy could not understand it. It was evident, however, that Tony could, for he called out:

"Goin' to pull farther in for shelter, are you? All right. Will you let some tired sailor-men aboard of you to ride in? We'll be glad to lend a hand."

This time there was no mistaking the answer.

"You're as welcome as the flowers in May," said a deep voice. "Drop around under our lee and come up."

"Be in a hurry, Bob," cried Tony, as he dropped back upon his seat and gave way on his oar. "The staysail is fillin', an' if she falls off much she'll run us under."

That was a moment of fearful suspense to the inexperienced Roy, who, dark as it was, could see that the immense ship was gradually swinging around toward the boat, slowly, to be sure, but with a power that seemed irresistible. But his crew were equal to the occasion. They easily got out of her reach, dropped around under her stern, and when Tony gave the word, Bob seized the painter

and tossed it up to some one on deck, who promptly made it fast.

"Up you come with a jump," said a commanding voice, as Bob went up the painter hand over hand, while Tony lingered to stow the oars so that the waves would not wash them out of the boat.

"Toddle for'ard and lend a hand with the head-sails, if you know enough to find the ropes in the dark. Do you?" added the voice, as Bob tumbled over the side and stood upon the deck facing the speaker, who held up a lighted lantern so that he could have a good view of the sailor's features. His own features were revealed as well, and Bob stared hard at them.

"Well, if you are Cap'n Jack Rowan," was his mental reflection, "you are as fine a specimen of a sea-tiger as I ever looked at; an' I wish Tony an' Willis an' that young monkey who brought me into your den was all sunk a hunderd fathoms deep, so I do."

"Here's another and another," exclaimed the man with the lantern, as Roy and Tony

came over the rail. "Is that all of you? Go for'ard and lend a hand."

"Hold hard, sir," said Tony. "I've got a letter for you." And after considerable fumbling in the pocket of his pea-jacket with his hand, Tony drew it out and gave it to the captain, who said "All right," and hurried to his cabin to read it; for the light of the lantern was so dim that he could not even decipher the writing on the envelope.

"A letter for him!" thought Roy. "It's very strange. That looks as though Tony expected to find this ship here, and that he was holding straight for her when he declared he was heading for a hack-stand. But what's the odds? I'd rather have a good ship under me than be out in this wind in a cranky little boat."

Having never been aboard a seagoing vessel before, Roy Sheldon would have taken the deepest interest in all that was going on around him if there had only been light enough for him to see plainly; but he made some observations in spite of the darkness. He found that the deck under his feet seemed to be as solid

as the ground; that the waves which had tossed Tony's boat like a chip in a mill-pond had but little effect upon the ship's huge bulk; and he gave it as his private opinion that she was big enough and strong enough to ride out any storm that ever swept the ocean. But there was one thing Roy did not know, and he was two or three hundred miles from New London harbor when he found it out. Strong as she appeared to be, the ship was unseaworthy, her timbers were decayed, and the underwriters wouldn't look at her. The owner was taking his personal risk in sending her abroad with a valuable cargo, and that was one reason why she had found it so hard to ship a crew.

"Lay for'ard an' lend a hand with the headsails," said Tony, when the man with the lantern disappeared down the companion-way. "Come along, lad, and we'll make a sailor-man of you."

Nothing loth, Roy stumbled forward in Tony's wake, laid hold of a rope when his guide did, and pulled with all his strength, although he had not the slightest idea what he

and the rest were pulling for. As often as the flashes of lightning illumined the scene, he improved the opportunity to take a survey of his surroundings; but all he saw was that there was a heavy sail slowly rising over his head, and that there were a goodly number of men on deck, all of whom were working at something. He was so deeply occupied with his own thoughts, wondering how he would feel if he were going to sea on that ship as one of the crew, and be required to scrub decks, tug at wet ropes, go aloft in all sorts of weather, and submit to hard fare and hard treatment besides.—Roy's mind was so busy with these reflections that he did not hear the command, "'Vast heavin'. Slack away on that halliard," nor did he dream that the order was addressed to himself, until the rope, at which he was still pulling with all his might, was jerked from his hands with such force that Roy was sent headlong to the deck. He scrambled to his feet as quickly as he could, but before he reached a perpendicular some enraged sailor gave him a hearty kick.

"I guess they don't want me around,"

thought Roy, "and no doubt I am in the way so I'll go aft. Is that that the way they use a foremast hand, I wonder—kick him when he falls down through no fault of his own? I am glad I am not a sailor."

When Roy had a chance to look about him, as he did as often as the lightning flashed over the deck, he saw that a good many things had been done during the few minutes that had elapsed since he boarded the vessel. Besides the sailors who were busy with the head-sails, a second party of men, under another officer, had been equally active on the quarter-deck; another huge sail had been given to the breeze, and a man sent to the wheel. The vessel was gathering rapid headway, and, what seemed strange to Roy, she was not rounding to in order to go up the harbor, because the lights which pointed out the position of the piers in the lower end of the city were still on the left hand, and one by one they danced away out of sight over the port quarter. The ship was holding straight for the entrance to the bay, through which she would soon pass to the open sea.

"By gracious! We shall be in a pretty fix if we don't get off immediately," soliloquized Roy, holding fast to the rail and looking in vain for Tony and Bob. "What can those men be thinking of? If they delay much longer I shall cast off in that boat and do the best I can by myself."

"Lay aloft and loose to'gallantsails," shouted a voice, almost in Roy's ear. "Up you go, ye young sea-monkey!"

"I don't belong here," replied Roy, turning about and finding himself face to face with one of the mates, who emphasized his order by waving his arm toward the topsail yard. "But I'll do the best I can if you think you can trust me. How long before you are going to run into the harbor?"

If the mate heard and understood the question he did not take the trouble to reply to it. He simply shouted, "Lay aloft and be quick about it!" and then backed up against the rail so that he could watch the movements of the men who had already responded to the command to loose topgallant-sails.

"I know I'll not be of the least use up there,"

said Roy, as he scrambled up the ratlines, "but I'll have something to talk about when I get ashore."

Roy worked his way upward until his progress was stopped by something that frightened him. It was the futtock-shrouds, the terror of every greenhorn. Above his head was a sort of platform, with an opening through it large enough to admit of the passage of an ordinary sized man, and over the edge of it ran a rope ladder to a second series of shrouds leading to a similar platform still higher up. That was the way Roy described the situation to himself, and it is the only way I can describe it, for an Expert Columbia is not supposed to know any thing about ships.

"Great Scott!" panted Roy; "do the sailors, every time they go aloft, have to creep around the outer edge of that platform, and hang with their backs downward, like flies on a ceiling? or do they go through that opening close to the mast? I wonder if that isn't the 'lubber's hole' I have so often read of? I don't care what it is; I'll stay here. But why don't the ship come about and go toward the harbor,

if she's going to? I wonder if that light off there, which blazes up so brightly every minute or two and then disappears, isn't on the lightship. If it is, this ship's going to sea, and we'll go with her if we don't get off directly."

While the boy was talking to himself in this way he did not permit anything that transpired within the range of his vision to escape his notice. He might never again have opportunity to see sail made aboard ship, and now was the time for him to learn something. He heard an almost constant scurrying of feet below, mingled with a chorus of unintelligible commands, some of which were addressed to the dozen or more men who were clinging to a swaying yard over his head, and finally an answering "Ay, ay, sir," came out of the darkness and the men began to "lay down from aloft." Before Roy knew what they meant to do, they were crowding past him on their way to the deck. The last to go by him was Tony.

"What you doin' here, lad?" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you come up higher an' lend a hand with the topsail?"

"The mate or some other officer told me to come, and here I am; although I assured him I wouldn't be of any use," replied Roy. "I was afraid to go any higher. Look here; isn't it about time we were going ashore? I don't believe this ship means to go up the harbor at all."

Tony made some reply under his breath, but Roy did not understand it.

"What's that flash I see every little while off the port bow?" he continued. "It comes from the lightship which is anchored at the mouth of the harbor, doesn't it? We're going as close to her as we can lie in this wind, and when we pass her we'll be outside, won't we? You had better find out whether or not the captain wants to send any word off in response to the letter you gave him, and then we'll go ashore."

Roy was not a little surprised by the way Tony acted while he was talking to him. He clung to the shrouds with one hand, holding his hat on with the other, all the time uttering the most incomprehensible ejaculations, and glaring wildly around as if he were trying to

get his bearings. At last he seemed to recover his power of speech by a mighty effort, and something he said sent a thrill of horror all through Roy Sheldon.

"She's a-goin', easy enough, an', lad, me an' you an' Bob is shanghaied," stammered Tony.

Roy did not grasp the full meaning of the last word. It was the sailor's manner that impressed and frightened him.

CHAPTER IX.

A SWIM IN ROUGH WATER.

"YES, sir, we're shanghaied," repeated Tony, looking over his shoulder at the lights on shore, which appeared to be moving away from the ship, and going faster and faster as the minutes flew by. "That's what's the matter of me an' you an' Bob. We've been stole from our homes an' friends an' tooken to sea agin our will."

"No!" gasped Roy, who was almost paralyzed by these ominous words. "It can't be possible."

"That's what the matter of us, an' you'll find it so."

"But I'll not go. I don't belong aboard this ship, and the captain has no business to take me to sea against my will."

"Small odds it makes to the likes of him whether he's got any business to do it or not,"

answered Tony, who, far from showing the least sign of anger over the outrage of which he was the victim, seemed disposed to accept his fate with as much fortitude as he was able to command. "Where have you lived all your life, that you don't know that that's the way shipmasters sometimes do when they can't raise a crew as fast as they want to? They get men aboard their vessels an' run away with 'em. That's what they are doin' with us."

"But I'll not do duty, I tell you," exclaimed Roy, fairly dazed by the gloomy prospect before him. "I can't, for I am not a sailor. Let's go down and tell the captain to luff and let us off."

"'Twon't do no good," answered Tony, with a sigh of resignation. "He'll only swear at you an' say that the mates will very soon break you in an' larn you your duty. We're in for a long, hard voyage, an' might as well give up all thoughts of gettin' ashore first as last."

"Never!" said Roy, wrathfully. "If there is such a thing—"

"Lay down from aloft!" shouted a voice

from the deck, following up the command with a volley of oaths and threats that were enough to make a landsman shudder.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Tony. "Why don't you say the same, lad? You've got to come to it, for it will be worse for you if you don't. There ain't the least use in kickin', for Cap'n Jack has got us hard an' fast."

Roy, who could plainly hear the beating of his heart above the howling of the gale, which seemed to be increasing in fury every moment, followed Tony to the deck, and immediately made his way aft to demand an interview with the captain. He found him easily—at least he found the man who went below with the lantern—and thus addressed him:

"Captain, I thought you were going into the harbor for shelter, but I find you are going to sea. Will you luff long enough to let me and my crew get into our boat and shove off?"

To Roy's surprise and indignation the captain did not appear to be listening to him at all. He kept his gaze fastened upon something ahead of the ship, and now and then turned to give an order to the man at the wheel. If Roy

had only known it, he was forcing himself upon the captain's notice at a most critical time. The latter was trying to take his vessel out of the bay without the aid of a pilot, and of course his attention was so fully occupied that he had neither the leisure nor the inclination to listen to any requests or complaints.

"Starboard a spoke or two. Steady at that. Mr. Crawford," shouted the captain, addressing one of his mates, "if that man with the lead can't speak so that I can hear him, knock him overboard and put somebody else in his place. How close to the light-ship can I run in this tide?"

"If you don't run in closer than you are now you'll be aground in a minute more," was the reply that was shouted aft. "Quarter less three on the port bow."

Roy paid little attention to this conversation, though he thought of it afterward, for it was a most fortunate thing for him that the vessel was obliged to run within a stone's throw of the light-ship. He wanted the skipper to speak to him.

"Captain," said he in a louder tone, at the same time drawing a step nearer and taking the unwarrantable liberty to pluck him by the coat-sleeve. "Captain, will you please—"

"What do you want here?" thundered the angry skipper, kicking at the boy with his heavy boot. But the words, which came just a second or two before the kick, served as a warning of what might be expected, and when the captain's boot got where he had been, Roy wasn't there. He dodged out of the way very cleverly, and raised his voice in useless remonstrance.

"Do you know who you are kicking at?" he exclaimed. "I am not one of your crew to be driven about in this fashion. I came aboard under a misapprehension, and want to go ashore. My boat is alongside."

What the skipper would have said or done if it had not been for something that happened just then, I don't pretend to know. Beyond a doubt he would have made the free-spoken Roy sup sorrow with a big spoon, if Tony and Bob had not unwittingly created a diversion in his favor. When they saw Roy standing so near

the captain they took heart, and came aft to say a word for themselves, but repented of it when the enraged skipper undertook to drive the boy forward with a kick. But then it was too late for them to escape punishment for their assurance in venturing into the captain's presence without being asked. One of the mates saw them when they went aft, and made it his business to follow them with a piece of rope in his hand. Roy saw him swing it in the air and knew what he meant to do with it; but before he had time to shout a warning to the men for whose backs it was intended, the rope fell twice in quick succession, and with such force that Tony and Bob staggered under the blows.

"Lay for'ard, where you belong, and come on the quarter-deck when you've got business here" shouted the mate. He raised the rope to give emphasis to his order, but the two men hurried out of his reach. Then the mate looked at Roy.

"Give him a dose, too, Mr. Crawford," said the captain. "He's no right to come here bothering me at this juncture. You might

as well teach him his place one time as another."

Roy opened his lips to protest against such an outrage, but seeing the mate advancing upon him, he turned and took to his heels. In half a minute more he was hauling at a rope in company with somebody whom he took to be Tony; but it proved to be a sailor who was posted in regard to the vessel and her contemplated movements.

"What ship is this?" whispered Roy, trying hard to swallow a big lump that seemed to be rising in his throat.

"The White Squall," was the answer.

"Is she going to sea?"

The sailor prepared to give a profane response to the question, which was so simple that a blind boy ought to have been able to answer it for himself, but when he came to look at Roy he hesitated, and choked back the words that arose to his lips.

"Yes, she's bound out, and you haven't any call to go with her, have you?" said he. "It's a hard case, but I don't see what you can do about it."

"Isn't there any law to punish a captain for taking men to sea against their will?" asked Roy.

"Not on the high seas," was the reply. "The only law there is outside is the cap'n's will. How come you aboard here in the first place?"

Roy explained the situation as briefly as he could, whereupon the sailor laughed incredulously.

"That crew of your'n must be into the plot," said he.

"What plot?" inquired Roy.

"Why, isn't there somebody ashore who don't want you there, and who would be glad to have you carried so far away that you would never get back again?"

"Of course there isn't," said Roy, amazed at the idea.

"Then it's mighty strange," continued the sailor, reflectively. "The wind don't blow to hurt anything, and that crew of your'n could have taken you to the city if they had been so minded."

"You're mistaken there. They dared not

turn about for fear our boat would be capsized. It isn't likely that they would have come aboard this ship if they had known that they were going to be kidnapped, would they?"

"Aha!" exclaimed the sailor. "So they have been shanghaied too, have they? Then I can't understand the matter at all. No, they wouldn't have come here if they had known that, for I have heard that the cap'n is one of the worst brutes that any poor chap ever sailed under."

"Then why do you sail with him? Were you shanghaied, too?"

"Oh no; I was shipped all straight enough, but, bless you, I never knew what sort of a craft I was getting onto till it was too late to back out. But I never expect to reach Canton alive."

"Canton?" cried Roy. "Is that where this ship is bound?"

"It's the port the old man intends to bring up in if he can keep afloat that long. Being as I'm here, I'm going to do an able seaman's duty as long as I am on top of water. You

say you came off in a boat. Where is she now?"

Roy replied that she was towing alongside.

"Well, look here," said the sailor hastily. "Do you see that flash ahead? It comes from the light-ship. If you know when you are well off, you will jump into that boat of your'n and pull for that light the best you know how. It's your only chance, for I don't believe this old tub will ever see port again."

"So I can," said Roy joyfully. "Will you go with me? and I can tip Tony and Bob the wink and have them go too?"

"Not by no means," said the sailor, as if the idea of such a thing was enough to frighten him. "Take care of yourself, and let the rest do the same. Are you going to try it?" he added, when Roy let go his hold upon the rope and looked around to see what had become of the mate. "Then make a sure thing of it the first time trying. Don't allow yourself to be brought back, for if you do you'll wish you had never been born. You'd better sink right here in the harbor than trust yourself to this

ship and her officers. It don't matter about me, for I am used to hard knocks."

The sailor's earnest words frightened Roy, but did not deter him from carrying out the bold plan he had suddenly formed in his mind. Casting his eye around the deck to make sure that the mate with the rope's end was nowhere in sight, he moved swiftly along the weather rail, until he thought he saw a chance to dart over to the other side without being seen. He crossed the deck with a few quick steps and looked over into the water. There was the boat, still right side up, and her painter was within easy reach of his hand. More than that, as if to encourage him in his desperate resolve, the flash from the light-ship, now close aboard, burst through the gloom, and showed him everything as plainly as though it had been broad daylight. The dark waves with their white caps looked very threatening, but so did the prospect he had before him of making a long voyage under brutal officers and in an unseaworthy vessel.

"It's now or never," thought Roy, shutting his teeth hard and calling all his courage to

his aid. "In five minutes more that lightship will be so far out of reach—"

Just then something took him full in the eye, and Roy, who had bent over while working at the boat's painter, straightened up with a jerk, and flopped down upon his back. Scarcely realizing what had happened to him, the boy scrambled to his feet only to receive a blow in the other eye, and to hear the mate shout at him, in tones of suppressed fury:

"Going to desert, were you? I expected it, and have had my gaze fastened on you all along. Take that and that, and see if it will do you until I can get a better chance at you."

Did the enraged officer intend to kill him where he lay? Roy wondered, as he raised his arm to ward off the heavy blows from the rope's end that were aimed at his head. It is quite possible that the brute would have disabled him had not the captain, who had witnessed the whole proceeding, called out:

"Cast the boat adrift, Mr. Crawford. That will put an end to all such nonsense."

The officer turned to obey the order, and in an instant Roy was on his feet. At the same

instant, too, the sailor's warning words came into his mind like an inspiration: "Don't allow yourself to be brought back, for if you do you will wish you had never been born. You'd better sink right here in the harbor than trust yourself to this ship and her officers," and something the mate said while he was striking at him with the rope's end satisfied Roy that there was more punishment of some sort coming as soon as the officer could find time to administer it.

"Another such a beating as that would lay me up sure," thought Roy, drawing his hand across his face and looking around to see where he was. "I can't stand it and I won't."

Roy sprang away from the rail, but quick as the action was, the movement the vigilant officer made to defeat it was almost as quick. His brawny hand shot out like a flash, and by the merest chance missed a hold upon Roy's arm. His strong fingers fastened into the boy's shirt-sleeve, and during the brief but furious struggle that followed either the stitches or cloth gave away. At any rate when the mate straightened up he was holding the

sleeve of Roy's shirt in his grasp, and Roy himself, having cleared the deck in two or three jumps, was standing upon the lee rail.

"Come back here, you villain," roared the mate, starting forward, "or I'll haze you till you'll be glad to go overboard in mid-ocean."

But the boy preferred to go overboard in the harbor, where he stood a chance—a bare chance—of rescue. He did not see the pilot-boat that dashed by just then, but he saw the light-ship riding at her anchorage a short distance away, and without pausing to take another look at the angry waters, for fear that the sight of them would be too much for his courage, he sprang into the air. The mate reached the side just a minute too late. The deserter was well out of his way.

"That's the end of him, sir," said he, turning to the captain.

"Let the pilot-boat take care of him," said the latter gruffly. "I can't stop to bother with him."

This was all that was said aboard the White Squall, and nothing whatever was done to aid the deserter; but the pilot-boat officers had

more humanity. As soon as their vessel could be thrown up into the wind a boat was put into the water, and for half an hour or more the crew pulled about in various directions, looking for Roy, who was swimming for the light-ship with slow and easy strokes. He was by all odds the best swimmer in Mount Airy, and his skill and long wind stood him well in hand now. He was badly frightened at first when the waves broke over his head and bore him under, but he always came to the surface in time to catch the next one, which not only carried him rapidly toward his haven of refuge, but kept him afloat long enough to get his breath and fill his lungs for the next plunge.

Roy afterward said that that long swim in rough water was more like a dream than a reality. When he found that he had no trouble in keeping on top the water long enough to breathe fully and freely, but two ideas filled his mind. One was to reach the light-ship before his strength gave out; the second to lose no time, after he got ashore, in doing something for Bob and Tony who were being carried away

in that unseaworthy ship. He was afterwards sorry that he wasted so much sympathy upon them.

About the time the pilot-boat's crew began to despair of picking up the deserter, and filled away to the city to tell the story of his "deliberate suicide" to eager reporters, who published it in their papers the next morning, and Roy was becoming weary of buffeting the waves, the swim was ended and help speedily came. A friendly billow threw him against one of the swaying hawsers that kept the light-ship in place, and the boy held fast to it.

"Boat ahoy!" yelled Roy, with all the strength of his lungs.

An instant later the sagging of the cable soused him under; but the wind caught up his voice and carried it across the intervening space to the deck of the light-ship, and when Roy came up again he saw a couple of tarpaulins above her rail, and as many lanterns hanging over the side.

"Where away?" shouted a voice, that somewhat resembled the deep bass of a fog-horn.

"Here I am; holding fast to the anchor rope," replied Roy. "Can't you see me now?"

The boy's hand instinctively went to his head; but the cap he intended to wave in the air to show the light-ship's men where he was, had been left aboard the White Squall to keep company with his shirt-sleeve. But if the men couldn't see him they heard his words, for the wind brought them plainly to their ears; and instead of stopping to ask him what he was doing in the water and how he got there in the first place, they pulled up their lanterns and hurried away.

"Hurrah for me!" said Roy to himself. "They've gone to lower a boat and I am all right—"

Just then another wave broke over his head; but when he came up again, Roy continued his soliloquy as if nothing had happened.

"Or shall be in a few minutes," said he. "I've learned a good many things to-night, and one of them is, that a wind that would keep our Mount Airy people ashore don't bother these deep-water fellows at all. I call

this a gale ; but these watermen, who are used to such things, run around in small boats as fearlessly as we take to Mirror Lake when there isn't a capful of wind to ruffle the surface."

Roy was plunged under a good many times while he waited for the men to come and take him off, but presently their boat hove in sight. She looked too large and heavy for two men to row, but she was built for just the work she was doing now, and Roy Sheldon was not the only one who owed his life to her and the gallant fellows who manned her. She came over the waves like a duck, and almost before Roy knew it he was sitting in her stern-sheets with a heavy coat around him. The men uttered exclamations of astonishment when they saw how he was dressed, but not a question did they ask until they had taken him safe aboard the light-ship and into a warm, well-lighted cabin.

"Pull off them wet duds and put on these here," said one of the men, laying some dry clothing on a chair near the stove.

"I am sorry to occasion you so much

trouble," began Roy, who saw that the oil-skin suits his rescuers wore were dripping with spray. "I have given you a long, hard pull."

"Oh, that's nothing," was the reply. "We're used to picking up folks, specially during the racing season when a yacht turns bottom side up now and then. But what made you get sick of your bargain so soon? Why didn't you let yourself go down, like you'd oughter?"

"What bargain?" exclaimed Roy. "And why ought I to let myself go down?"

"Why, you jumped off that there ship on purpose, 'cause me and my pardner seen you when you done it. We've been kinder looking for you ever since. We didn't go out after you, 'cause number 29's boat struck the water most as soon as you did."

"Who bunged your eyes for you?" asked the man who had not spoken before, and who was getting ready to give Roy a pot of hot coffee.

"Are they black?" said the boy angrily.

He glanced around the cabin, and seeing a small mirror fastened against the bulkhead on

the other side, he walked over and looked into it. Yes, his eyes were black.

"The ship I deserted from was the White Squall," said Roy; whereupon the lightship men nodded, as much as to say that the whole matter had been made clear to them. "I didn't belong to her. I was—what do you call it?—shanghaied? Yes; that was what was done to me, and also to the two men who started to row me from Shelly's Island to New London. One of the sailors told me I had better get off if I could see half a chance, and that was the way I came to be in the water. One of the mates knocked me down twice while I was working at the painter of our boat, and pounded me with a piece of rope till—well, look at that," added Roy, who, when he came to pull off his wet shirt, found that he could not do it without assistance. His arm pained him, and he could not use it as readily as usual. This led him to make an examination, and he found that the arm was bruised and discolored from shoulder to elbow.

"Yas," remarked one of the men, as if he

were speaking of an every-day occurrence, "I've seen a good many such whacks in my time."

"Do all officers pound their men in this fashion, and do you fellows submit to it?" cried Roy, in great surprise. "Well, I won't, I bet you. I'll have those two men arrested; the captain for kidnapping me, and the mate for using me up in this way."

"Drink this coffee and tell us when you're going to do all that," said one of the men.

"Yas," said the other. "And while I am helping you rub them bruises with this arnica, tell us how you're going to do it."

"When and how?" repeated Roy, as he submitted to the old sea-dog's rough but kindly administrations.

"Yas. You can't get ashore before morning, and by that time the White Squall will be miles and miles at sea. It'll be two years, mebbe three, before she makes this port again, and like as not there won't be a single man in her crew that she took away with her. Then where'll your witnesses be to prove that you

was shanghaied, and that the mate knocked you down and beat you with a rope's end?"

Roy backed toward the nearest bunk, sat down upon it and took a long and hearty drink of the hot coffee before he made any reply. He had comforted himself with the mental assurance that it would be an easy matter for him to bring the master of the White Squall to justice, but now he discovered that there were difficulties in the way.

"Law ain't made for the poor chaps that sail the high seas, but for landsmen," said the one who gave him the coffee. "Sailor-men ain't got no use for it, for nobody cares for them. I've heard enough about that ship and her cap'n to know that I shouldn't like to sail on her, and I tell you that you was mighty lucky to get away with a whole skin. The mate knocked you over while you was trying to cast off your boat; then what happened?"

"I made a dash for the other side of the ship and went overboard," answered Roy. "The mate made a grab for me, and besides tearing the sleeve out of my shirt he must have given my arm an awful wrench, for I can hardly lift

that pot of coffee with it. There isn't any danger that she will stop and take me off this boat, is there?"

The lightship men chuckled and winked at each other as though they thought Roy had said something amusing.

"Bless your simple heart! She's hull down before this time," one of them remarked. "You don't think that a ship that has been loaded and waiting for two or three weeks would stop to pick up a deserter, do you? and him a landsman that don't know one side of the deck from t'other? You'll never see the White Squall again less'n you stay here and look for her. What sort of clothes is them, any way, that you just took off? Looks something like a rowing rig, but 'tain't."

Roy replied that it was a bicycle uniform, and then went on to tell his story, hoping that the mention of Rowe Shelly's name might lead the men to give him some information concerning the runaway. They lived but a short distance from his island home, and Roy thought it possible they might know him; but he very soon became satisfied that they didn't. They

held little communication with the people on the neighboring islands, all their supplies, as well as the limited number of papers they read, being received from the mainland, and they did not act as though they had ever heard of Rowe Shelly before; but they showed Roy very plainly that there were some portions of his narrative they found it hard to believe, One of them turned on his heel with the remark that the wind didn't "blow to do any hurt," that there was no need of anybody "going aboard a ship for shelter on such a night" as that one was, and went on deck to see how things were going there; while the other, with the suspicion of a smile about his mouth, said to Roy:

"You're getting kinder white around the gills. Hadn't you better lay down in that there bunk before it gets worse on you? That's my advice."

"I do feel rather queer, that's a fact," answered the boy. "I suppose the pounding and swim together were too much for me."

"Yas; I reckon they were. But you'll be all right after a while."

The man followed his companion to the deck, and Roy lay down upon the bunk; but very gradually a suspicion crept into his mind that the beating he had received and his long swim in rough water had little to do with his miserable feelings.

"I am seasick," groaned Roy. "That's what's the matter with me. Being shut up in this warm, close cabin has done the business for me."

The boy made a shrewd guess. Many a long hour dragged its weary length away before he was "all right" again.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T BE "PUMPED."

ALL the rest of the night Roy Sheldon, who was ill indeed, rolled and tossed in his bunk without once closing his eyes in sleep. At first he was very much afraid that the light-ship would go down, she pitched so furiously; and as his malady grew upon him, he wished from the bottom of his heart that she would spring a leak and sink, and so put him out of his misery. To make matters worse, his rescuers never came near to sympathize with him, or ask if there was anything they could do to relieve him. They left him to fight the battle alone, and their neglect made Roy so indignant that he resolved he would not speak to them again, not even to thank them for the important service they had rendered him. Shortly after daylight, however, he fell into a refreshing slumber, and when he awoke

two hours later his sickness was all gone, and he was as hungry as a wolf.

"Well, my hearty," was the cordial way in which he was greeted when he rolled out of his bunk, "you don't look quite as blue about the gills as you did when you turned in. Feel any better? Set down and take another pot of coffee."

"Thank you. I feel a good deal more like myself," was Roy's reply. "I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am to you, or how glad I am that I went overboard when I did, and that I succeeded in laying hold of that anchor-rope before my wind and strength gave out. I was getting tired, I tell you. If I were aboard that ship now how far at sea would I be?"

"A hundred miles, or such a matter, in this wind, and with a fair chance of seeing furrin countries before you come back."

"I would have stood a better chance of becoming food for the sharks, if all I heard about her is true," said Roy, as he seated himself at one end of the mess-chest which served as a table. "The sailor who advised me to desert said he never expected to reach Canton

alive. Now, how soon can I get ashore to relieve the anxiety of my friends?"

That was a matter that was settled with half a dozen words. He was given to understand that he would be carried over to the nearest pier as soon as he had eaten his breakfast; and his mind being set at rest, he ate a hearty one. When he thanked the men for their kindness they laughed and said "that was all right," and showed some curiosity to know why Roy was so careful to take their names and address.

"I like to keep track of my acquaintances," said the boy; I may want to call upon you at some future time, and if I do, I shall know where to find you."

Breakfast being over, Roy, who had put on his own clothes when he left his bunk, climbed into the boat and was pulled ashore. There was a hack-stand near the pier on which he was landed, and although Roy did not know it at the time, Tony and Bob could have put him ashore there the night before if the instructions they received from Colonel Shelly's superintendent had not led them to follow a different

course. Being anxious to escape observation Roy took a hurried leave of the light-ship's men, hastened toward the hack-stand, and dived into the first carriage he came to.

"Pull up the windows, put down the curtains so that no one can see me, and go for the Lafayette House at your very best licks," said Roy to the astonished driver, who looked critically at the boy's sleeveless shirt and bandaged eye, and seemed in no particular hurry to obey.

"Been in a fight?" said he.

"Yes; been in half a dozen. Whipped more than forty men, and swam in from a hundred miles out at sea," replied Roy, impatiently. "I've money in my pocket and more at the hotel, if that is what you want to know. Hurry up, and I will give you double fare."

That was something the hackman could understand. Looking curiously at his passenger the while he hastened to obey his orders, and in a few seconds had made the carriage as close as an oven. But Roy did not care for that. He settled back in the corner, and wondered

what Arthur and Joe would say when he walked into their presence.

"I know I am a nice looking object," was his mental reflection, "but I should like to see either one of those fellows go through what I did and come out in better shape. I tell you I have had a narrow escape, and Rowe Shelly, whoever he may be, can thank his lucky stars that he was not in my place. I can't do anything for Bob and Tony, but I can bear those light-ship men in mind, and I will too."

With the prospect of a double fare before him the hackman drove as rapidly as he dared, and when he drew rein in front of the hotel to which he had been directed, Roy threw open the door and jumped out, crossed the wide sidewalk with a few swift steps, and sought concealment behind one of the front doors, every move he made being closely followed by the driver, who wanted to make sure of his money before he let his strange passenger out of sight. Then came that hurried interview with the hotel clerk, who could hardly be made to believe that Roy Sheldon was not Robert Barton, after which the new-comer

went to his room to change his clothes and send the porter out for a new helmet to take the place of the one he had left on board the White Squall.

"There," said Roy, as he stood before the mirror and tied a clean handkerchief over his left eye, "that looks a little more respectable, but not much. I must have a pretty hard head or that mate would have knocked me senseless. Suppose he had, and that I had been kicked out of the way or carried down into the forecastle, and never come to myself until this morning! I'd been a hundred miles or more at sea, and in a rotten old ship that is liable to go to pieces in the very first storm she encounters. It makes me shudder to think of it."

Having fixed himself up as well as he could, Roy went downstairs and into the reading-room to wait for Joe and Arthur to "show up." At the same time a sharp-looking gentleman, whose eyes were everywhere at once, walked briskly up to the clerk's desk and leaned upon it.

"What do you know?" said he. "I must

make out a column some way or other, and if you don't help me out, I shall always think you ought to."

"I don't know a thing," roplied the clerk. "Go into the reading-room and pump that fellow with the bunged-up eye. He's a wheelman from Mount Airy. Came in yesterday with two others, and got into trouble before he had fairly eaten his supper. That's his name right there," added the clerk, as the sharp-looking man, who was a newspaper reporter, pulled a note-book from his pocket and wrote something in it in short-hand. "He just as good as told me that he was mistaken for Rowe Shelly, kidnapped and taken over to the island, and barely escaped being carried to sea."

"On what vessel?" exclaimed the reporter, showing some excitement and no little interest.

"Don't know. Didn't think to ask him, for he was in a great hurry to go to his room."

"So Rowe Shelly has skipped again, has he?" said the reporter. "That won't do me any good, for Shelly owns some of our stock and we can't dip into his private affairs.

Don't tell anybody else of it, there's a good fellow, for I want to get a scoop on this whole business. Did this what's his name—Sheldon, look as though he had been in the water?"

"Come to think of it, he did. His uniform was shrunk and mussed, one sleeve of his shirt was missing, and both his eyes were blacked. At least one was, for I saw it. He kept the other covered up."

"I'll bet it's the same chap. Haven't you seen this morning's *Tribune?* Well, there's an article in it, with the blackest kind of headlines, entitled, 'Mutiny in the Harbor. A Sailor prefers Death to a Voyage in the White Squall,' and so forth and so on, *et cetera.* One of our fellows wrote that up, and now you just watch me get the sequel. Hoop-la! My column's safe. How'll I know him—by his bunged-up eyes?"

"Look right through the door. That's him, with the blue uniform on and a paper in his hand. But hold on a minute," said the clerk, as the reporter turned away. "If you mean to get anything out of him you'll have to be sly about it, for he says he won't be pumped."

"Oh, won't he? We'll see about that."

Roy Sheldon, who was deeply interested in that article in the *Tribune*, and congratulating himself on the fact that his name was not mentioned in it, and that consequently his father and mother would never hear of his adventure until he was ready to tell them about it, did not so much as raise his eyes when the reporter came in and sat down near him. He went on with his reading until he heard a pleasant voice say:

"Good morning, Mr. Sheldon. You have had a pretty rough experience, have you not?"

If the chair in which he was sitting had suddenly given away and let him down on the floor, Roy would not have been half as much astonished as he was when he heard himself addressed in this way by a man whom he had never seen before. He looked at him over the top of his paper, and then drew his head down behind it; whereupon the reporter pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his face to conceal the smile that came to his lips.

"Of course you don't mind what those lightship men said to *me*," he continued.

"Oh! did they tell you about it?" exclaimed Roy, and that was all the reporter wanted to show him that he was on the right track. Being shrewd and experienced in his profession, he had already made up his mind just what that 'sequel' was going to be. The sailor, who was seen by the captain of pilot-boat number twenty-nine to jump into the harbor, was not a seafaring man, but a wheelman. He had succeeded in reaching the light-ship, whose crew rescued him, brought him ashore in the morning, and here he was. Roy had told the clerk he would not be interviewed; but that did not worry the reporter.

"Yes; I have heard all about it," said he. "You see, I am the fellow who supplies those light-ship men with some of their reading-matter."

"Oh," said Roy again, "I was afraid you might be a reporter."

"My dear sir, do I look as if I were that low down in the world? What's the reason you don't want to see any news-gatherers? You have been the hero of an adventure, and most boys would like to see it in print."

"It's in print already, but fortunately the man who wrote about it did not know my name," replied Roy. "There's a long account of it in the *Tribune*?"

"And is that account correct?"

"Perfectly. But my father takes the *Tribune*, and if he had seen my name in that article he would have ordered me home in short order."

"And you don't want to go, I suppose?"

"Certainly not," answered Roy, who then went on to tell where he *did* want to go; and to prove that his father would be likely to tell him to come home if he got into trouble, he related what Mr. Wayring had done when he learned through the New London papers that Matt Coyle had tied Joe to a tree and threatened to beat him with switches.

"I remember of reading about that," said the reporter. "One of the *Tribune's* staff was stopping at the Sportsman's Home at the time, and he was the one who wrote it up. I don't blame you for not wanting your name mentioned in connection with that little episode in the harbor last night, and you are wise in

keeping your weather eye open for reporters. That's the only one you can keep open, isn't it? Who shut up the other one for you?"

It was by such ingenious and apparently disinterested questions as these, that the reporter gradually led Roy Sheldon on to tell his story from beginning to end. He was really astonished when the boy brought his narrative to a close, and told himself that he was master of some secrets that would eventually bring Colonel Shelly and his superintendent into trouble, and the runaway Rowe into his rights. More than one reporter has run to earth criminals whom the best detectives could not track, and Roy's visitor suddenly resolved that he would do a little in that line himself. He would have given something handsome to know where Rowe was at that minute and what he intended to do; but Roy could not enlighten him. On the other hand, he asked the reporter to tell him what he knew about Rowe himself.

"That boy is well fixed over there on the island," said he. "Everybody is kind to him, he has everything money can buy, and he

wouldn't run away unless there was good cause for for it," said Roy. I wasn't on the island long enough to learn much about him; can't you tell me something?"

"I am sorry to say I can't," said the reporter, as he arose from his chair. "I have never been on the island, and don't know the first thing about Rowe Shelly and his family relations, except what I have heard in a roundabout way. Look here," he added, sinking his voice almost to a whisper; "do you see those three fellows talking with the clerk? Look out for them. They are reporters for evening papers. Tell 'em you're busy—that your eyes are so black you can't talk to 'em—tell 'em anything you can think of, for if you don't, they will have you in print sure pop. So-long, and a pleasant trip if I don't see you again before you leave the city."

So saying the reporter winked at Roy, and hurried away to write up the "sequel" for the evening edition of his paper, while Roy hid behind his copy of the *Tribune*. The three men against whom he had been warned came in at last, but if they wanted information they

did not get much. Roy was very unsociable, and they finally departed with the conviction that the *Tribune's* man had been too sharp for them this time.

Roy's next visitor was Willis, and the next two were Joe Wayring and Arthur Hastings, who would scarcely have recognized him if it had not been for his uniform. They listened in great amazement to his story, which I afterward heard just as I have tried to tell it, and never once said a word to interrupt him. Arthur's indignation was almost unbounded; while the clear-sighted Joe saw two or three things in the narrative which proved to his satisfaction that Roy's visit to the White Squall was not purely accidental. But the trouble was, Roy himself did not think so, and he had not really said anything that was calculated to throw suspicion upon the superintendent. It was plain, however, that Willis was afraid he might say something, for as soon as Roy's story was finished he got upon his feet and put on his hat.

"As you remarked a little while ago, 'all's well that ends well,'" said he. "I am

heartily glad you got safely out of that scrape, Mr. Sheldon, and hope you will speedily recover from the effects of your treatment at the hands of that brutal mate. I wish he might be punished for it; but it is just as those men on the lightship told you. The White Squall will not return for two or three years, and by that time the men who now comprise her crew may be scattered to the ends of the globe. I wish you good-morning, and a pleasant run across the State."

So saying, Willis bowed himself out of the reading-room, and Babcock went with him, leaving the three friends alone.

"Say, old fellow," exclaimed Joe, settling back in his chair and looking at Roy, "you've more pluck than I ever gave you credit for, but not half as much mother-wit."

"What has gone wrong with you now?" asked Roy, in reply.

"Nothing whatever; but if you don't find that something has gone wrong with you, I shall miss my guess. And you are the boy who wouldn't be pumped, are you? Well, you are a good one."

"I tell you I didn't give those three reporters the first grain of information," said Roy, bridling up.

"No; but you gave the first one who gained your ear all the information he wanted. That fellow who came his Oily Gammon over you and told you that he supplied the lightship's crew with a portion of their reading matter, was a reporter. He'll have the whole thing in his paper to-night, and you will have to go home."

"And that means all of us," added Arthur.

"No!" gasped Roy, alarmed by the thought. "Let's get away from the city without an hour's delay. If we do that, we can prolong our run as far as Bloomingdale; for you know that was the first place at which we were to stop for letters."

"But you can't ride," said Joe.

"What's the reason I can't?" inquired Roy. "I know my arm is almost useless, but my legs are all right, as I will show you when we are fairly on the road again. Say, fellows, let's make the pace hot enough to reach Bloomingdale and get beyond it before any return orders can catch us."

"Why not avoid the place altogether?" suggested Arthur. "Have you had your arm examined by a surgeon?"

Roy said he hadn't thought of it, and Arthur continued: "Then we'll have it done at once. If he says you can ride, we'll take to the road at once. If he says you can't, that settles it."

Great was their relief when the medical man, to whom they were directed, told Roy that, although he had received a pretty severe fall (he thought Roy had taken a header and the latter was quite willing to have it so), he would be able to continue the run provided he could manage his wheel with one hand, and would promise not to run too fast.

"But," added the doctor, "it's a little the queerest hurt I ever saw from a header. I don't quite see how you managed to black both your eyes and injure your arm in one fall. If you had been in a fight with the canalers I could understand it. You mustn't think of going on for at least two or three days. Lie still to-morrow and next day, take a short run on Saturday, stop over somewhere in the

country on Sunday, and make a fresh start on Monday."

When the boys heard this their countenances fell; but, as Arthur had said, "that settled it." All they could do was to make themselves miserable for the rest of the day and the whole of the two succeeding ones. They could not even visit their friends in the city, for if they did, every one would want to know where Roy Sheldon was, and why he didn't show himself.

"I'm a pretty looking fellow to go calling, am I not?" said the latter dolefully. "It can't be done, boys. I'd have to tell the truth, and I might as well go home at once as to do that. I'm going to hug my room the best I know how, and you'll have to see that I don't starve; for now that I have found you, I am not going to exhibit myself in that reading-room again. Now, come up-stairs and tell me all you know about Rowe Shelly."

The story his friends had to tell was not near as long as his own, but it was fully as interesting. It required but a few words from them to make everything clear to Roy's com-

prehension. The man who claimed to be Colonel Shelly and Rowe's guardian was a fraud, the boy's parents were still living, and he was determined to find them in spite of all the obstacles that could be thrown in his way. That was all there was of it.

"I hope from the bottom of my heart that he will succeed," said Roy earnestly. "When I was in the water swimming for the lightship, I felt bitter toward everybody; but now that I have come safely out of the worst scrape I ever was in, I don't feel so. The clerk, who evidently knows a little about Rowe and his affairs, declared that he was a fool for running away, but somehow I couldn't believe it. Now I know he isn't. If one of us was in his place they'd have to put guards all around that island to keep him there."

"How far was it from the White Squall to the lightship?"

"About twice as far as Mirror Lake is wide. The swim wasn't anything to be afraid of, but the rough water—"

"And the sharks," interposed Arthur.

"By gracious!" exclaimed Roy, jumping

up from the bed on which he had but a moment before laid himself down. "I never thought of sharks, and I'm glad I didn't. It would have made a coward of me sure, and I was near enough to that as it was. But they do have them around that lightship, don't they? I have seen the fact stated in the papers before now. It took all the pluck I had to face the waves, and if I had thought of sharks I don't believe you ever would have seen me again."

"Rowe wouldn't have had the courage to do what you did," observed Arthur.

"I don't think he would," said Joe. "But then he never would have been called upon to do it, for that man Willis would not have sent him aboard the White Squall to be carried to sea."

"You don't think Willis got Tony and Bob and me shanghaied on purpose, do you?" exclaimed Roy, who had not dreamed of such a thing. "You are surely mistaken. I saw those men driven to duty with a piece of rope."

"I don't say they knew they were going to be kidnapped when they took you aboard that

vessel, but that it was a part of the superintendent's plan for getting rid of the whole of you," replied Joe, who then went on to tell why he thought so. Three different sailor men with whom Roy had conversed assured him that the wind didn't blow to hurt anything, that there was no need that anybody in a small boat should seek shelter on a vessel on such a night as last night was, and if Roy could not see that that proved something, he was by no means as bright as Joe thought he was.

"I can see it now," said Roy. "If I could only bring it home to him wouldn't I—"

"No doubt you would: but there's the trouble. You can't prove anything. I am sorry you let that reporter bamboozle you into telling him all about your adventure. The fellows he told you to look out for were on rival papers, and it was his business to keep them from getting any information out of you if he could. I wish the evening papers were out."

The others wished so too, but four long hours passed before the voice of the newsboy was heard in the street, and then Arthur made a rush for the door. When he returned he had

a copy of all the evening papers on sale, but the *Tribune* was the only one Roy cared to see, and it was promptly passed over to him.

"Here it is in black and white," he groaned, almost as soon as he opened the sheet. "'A Plucky Wheelman. Something that might have been a Tragedy. The Truth about it.' Read it out and then go and pound that reporter."

Arthur complied with many misgivings, but as he read he often paused to look at his chums, who stared at him and at each other in turn. Everything that happened on board the White Squall was truthfully described, the brutality of the ship's officers was denounced in no measured terms, Roy's short but desperate struggle with the mate was told in graphic language, but the only ones whose real names were mentioned were the two lightship men, Captain Jack Rowan and the scoundrel Crawford. Roy Sheldon was called Peter Smith without a word of excuse or apology, while Rowe Shelly, his guardian, and Willis, the superintendent, were not spoken of at all. The boys could not understand it; but then they did not know

that Rowe's guardian was part owner of the *Tribune* and had influence enough to cause the discharge of any man on it who did not write to suit him. As soon as Arthur finished the article they all went to work to examine the other papers; but there was nothing in them about the "Plucky Wheelman." The *Tribune* had a "scoop" on all its competitors.

"That bangs me," said Roy, at length.

"It suits you, does it not?"

"Perfectly. It's better than I thought it could be. Of course our folks will read it, but they'll never dream that one of us had anything to do with it. That reporter is a brick. You needn't mind pounding him, boys."

"Thank you," said Joe, drily. "I had no intention of trying anything of the kind. I have heard of fellows going out to thrash newspaper men and coming home on a shutter. It might have been so in this case."

Arthur Hasting voiced the sentiments of his companions when he said he felt as if a big load had been taken off his shoulders. Their run wasn't "blocked" after all.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN.

ALTHOUGH Roy Sheldon and his friends were greatly relieved, and felt duly thankful to the reporter who had concealed the "plucky wheelman's" identity under a fictitious name, and thus prevented their trip from being brought to a sudden end, they were none the less impatient to take the road again, and their two days of enforced inactivity hung heavily on their hands. It would not be prudent for them to call upon their friends in the city, for, as Roy ruefully affirmed, they would have to tell them the truth, and they might as well go home as to do that. Concealment was the only thing left to them, but reading and sleeping, with an occasional discussion of their recent experience, were monotonous ways for healthy boys to pass the time. Roy's bruises demanded a little of their care and attention, and before long he had the satisfaction of knowing

that his arm was not as lame as it had been, and that his eyes were slowly resuming their natural color. But it was two weeks before the wondering rustics ceased to turn and gaze after him as he wheeled swiftly along the road.

Saturday morning came at last, and after a light breakfast the three Columbias were brought from their dark closet and set in motion again. Of course we—that is, my two companions and I—knew nothing of the strange things that had taken place on the night we were put into our closet for safe-keeping, and we were on the road at least a week before we heard as much of the story as I have already told you. We were fully two hundred miles from New London when we, most unexpectedly, heard more of it, and back in Mount Airy when we heard the conclusion; so you see I am not yet through with the events that grew out of Roy Sheldon's visit to the city.

Saturday's run was short, for my master insisted that the doctor's orders should be implicitly obeyed, but still it was a hard one. Before they were fairly out of the city limits the sand that was "knee-deep" obstructed

their way, and made the young wheelmen cast longing glances toward the towpath which was in plain view. But the sight of several groups of ragged urchins, some of whom tried hard and perseveringly to get a stone up to them, and the knowledge that one of their number was in no condition for a fight, if one was forced upon them, made them keep to the highway.

"But I tell you we'll not do it on Monday for all the canalers in the State," said Roy that night, when he and his companions dismounted before the little inn that was to be their stopping place. "We are so far out of the city now that we shall not see very many boats, and as often as we come in sight of a settlement of shanties, we'll climb up to the road and go around it."

The proprietor of the inn said he was used to the company of wheelmen, and the bountiful supper he set before the boys proved that he was. He gave them comfortable beds too, and on Monday morning showed them a path by which they could take their wheels down to the bank of the canal. It was much easier rid-

ing there than it was on the highway, but, as the Omaha wheelman said, they found the "unspeakable mule" there. They met a good many boats going into the city, and nearly every one of them was towed by a span of these interesting creatures. The boys dismounted and got out of the way as often as they saw them coming, but the mules were not to be deceived or cheated out of a stampede by any such shallow artifice as that. They saw the glittering wheels, and that was enough for them. They invariably turned like a flash and tore back along the path as though they were frightened out of their wits, but always stopped their headlong flight just in time to avoid being jerked into the canal. It seemed to me that reasonable persons would have been satisfied with the precautions taken by the boys to avoid trouble, but I soon learned that the boatmen were not reasonable. They swore lustily, hurling their oaths at mules and cyclists with perfect impartiality, and now and then a very angry captain would order his steersman to "hold her clost in to the bank so't he could jump ashore an' pitch them

nuisances into the drink"; but when the boys heard such talk as that they mounted and sped lightly along, leaving the captain to recover his good-nature as soon as he got ready, and the driver to manage the mules in any way he could. By following this course, and by making a flank movement on every "settlement of shanties" that hove in sight, they finally reached Bloomingdale without doing very much riding in the sand.

They were now about a hundred and forty miles from home, and considered their journey fairly begun. Leaving out their first night in New London, they were more than pleased with their experience. Their health was perfect, their brains, to quote from Roy Sheldon, were "as clear as whistles," and they felt equal to any amount of hard work either on the road or at the table. Taking timid women, skittish horses, foolish mules, peppery canal-boat captains, combative boys and ugly dogs into consideration, a trip like this had just enough of the exciting and perilous in it to make it interesting.

Although my master and his chums longed

to hear from home, they opened the letters they found waiting for them in Bloomingdale with some fear and trembling. As I looked at it, it did not seem possible that adventures like Roy Sheldon's, and an exploit such as he had performed, could be kept covered up for any length of time (I have been told that such things have a way of "leaking out somewhere"), nor was it at all probable that every one who heard of them would be as considerate of Roy's wishes as the *Tribune* reporter had shown himself to be. I awaited the result with as much excitement as Roy Sheldon exhibited when he seated himself on the porch in front of the hotel and opened one of his mother's letters—the one that bore the latest date. I saw him run his eyes over the closely written pages, and when he laid that letter aside and picked up another, intending to read them in the order in which they were written, I knew before he said a word that his fears were groundless and that no return orders had been received.

"My folks don't suspect anything; how is it with yours?" said he, gleefully. "Mother

doesn't say a word about Peter Smith who was shanghaied and jumped overboard to escape being carried to sea, and that's all the evidence I want that she does not think I am that identical Peter."

Thanks to the thoughtful reporter, who did not want Roy to be called home although he *did* want all the news the boy had it in his power to give him, the truth was never suspected, and after a short rest the young wheelmen turned their backs upon the towpath and the pugnacious youngsters who lived beside it, and struck out again, this time running through a fine farming country, with just enough timber along the road to break the monotony of the scenery, and afford them shade as often as they felt inclined to take a breathing spell. They were not the only cyclists on the road, as they found before they had left Bloomingdale a dozen miles behind. They were wheeling along in Indian file at a moderate pace, when Joe Wayring, who brought up the rear, was surprised to hear a voice close to him say:

"If you have a mind to listen to it, I believe I can give you young gentlemen a word of

advice that may some day be of use to you." And before Joe could turn his head, a tall stranger on a big wheel rode up beside him. "Where have you come from and where are you going, if it is a fair question?" he continued, after returning Joe's greeting. "I judge from your bundles that you are on a trip; but I guess you haven't been out very long, or else you followed a different route from mine, for you are not half as dirty as I am."

This broke the ice, and in a few minutes the boys were on the best of terms with the strange wheelman, who could not, however, give them any "pointers" regarding their route, for he was going another way, and besides he was depending entirely upon his road-book. He had been out four weeks, but was on the way home now, weighed twenty pounds more than he did when he set out, and felt strong enough to tackle any dinner that was set before him. My master expressed his regrets because the stranger was not going their way, and asked him what that word of advice was he said he could give them.

"You wobble too much," said the wheel-

man, coming to the point at once. "I have been following behind for the last mile or so, and took notice of the fact that an eighteen-inch plank would scarcely be wide enough to cover your tracks."

"I've noticed that too," replied Roy, "but never thought it worth while to take the trouble to ride any differently. What's the odds so long as one has the whole road to wobble in?"

"None whatever," said the stranger, with a laugh, "only experts who come on your track will think you are not at all careful as to your style, or else they will put you down as new hands at the business. But suppose you should come to a railroad bridge with only a single plank laid down for one to walk upon. If you tried to run over it you would go off sure; and it would be a job to dismount and carry your wheels. Besides, when you got home you wouldn't like to confess that you had done such a thing."

"But you see we haven't found any bridges of that sort in our way yet, and we don't mean to," replied Joe. "Our plan is to follow the road and keep clear of the tracks."

"That's the resolve I made when I set out, but I haven't held to it. I am pretty well satisfied now that you are not very far from home."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you don't seem to care anything for distance; but wait until you have been in the saddle a week at a stretch, and you will be glad to cut off all the miles you can. You will find that the railroad generally follows the shortest route between two points, and if you have made up your minds to stop for the night at a certain place, you will want to get there the easiest way you can. That's the time you will probably take to the track and find some of the bridges I spoke of a minute ago."

The boys traveled several miles in company with the pleasant stranger who, to quote once more from Roy Sheldon, "was just chuck full of good stories and advice," and it was with much regret that they took leave of him, saw him turn off from their route and continue his journey alone. How often it happens that little things bring about great events! You shall presently see what grew out of this short in-

terview which happened by the merest accident.

"From this day forward I mend my style of riding," said Joe Wayring, when their chance companion had been left out of sight. "I never knew before that a wheelman left traces by which an expert could judge of his skill, but I know it now, and by this time next week I bet you I'll be steady enough to ride a six-inch plank on top of the highest railroad bridge in the country."

The others said the same, and from that moment began exercising more care in the management of their wheels. If that stranger could have come up behind them now, he would not have seen so many zig-zag tracks in the road. But no doubt he would have laughed at them for so quickly forgetting their resolve to "stick to the highway and steer clear of the railroad tracks"; for that was just what they did. Before a week had passed over their heads they began to realize that it required a good many motions with the pedals to take them a day's journey, and bring them to the place at which they had beforehand de-

cided to pass the night, that there was a good deal of sameness in wheeling, in spite of the new scenes and new faces that were constantly coming before them, and they were not so very long in learning by actual test that "the railroad usually follows the shortest route between two points." But, strange to say, they encountered but few cattle-guards, no bridges or trestle-works, and the culverts were so well covered that they scarcely knew when they passed over them. Except when following these short cuts they adhered rigidly to the instructions laid down in their road-book, but one day even that guide, which ought to have been infallible, led them astray; and here is the passage that did the mischief:

"After a good nooning among the Bergen shades a bee-line can be struck for Dorchester, over a road with occasional patches of sand. Luckily these patches can be avoided by making use of portages in the shape of the ever-welcome cow-path, which winds off to the side of the road most conveniently. The cow figures most usefully in touring as a path-maker in districts where the road commissioners are derelict. Also as a dispenser of a beverage

which is the best of all drinks anywhere, and especially on the road."

The guide-book also went on to say that at one place along the route a cow-path led directly to a brook, at which the weary and hungry wheelman might stop and cast a line with a more than reasonable expectation of catching a good-sized trout for his dinner.

"We've struck it," said Arthur, who had read aloud the route for that particular day before the three left their hotel in the morning. "Here's the sand, and it's knee-deep too, as sand always is. Now, where is the cow-path that leads to the brook?"

"Here's a path, but whether it goes to the brook or not, I can't guess," answered Joe. "Let's try it, and see if it will take us to a dispenser of that beverage, whatever it is, the book speaks of."

"It's milk," said Roy, smacking his lips. "I'd a little rather have it off the ice, but I wouldn't refuse it warm just now, for I am thirsty and hungry besides."

"That's nothing new," retorted Joe.

"You've been that way ever since we left home. Come on, fellows. Somebody has been through here, for the most of the branches have been removed, and a log or two cut out of the path."

"What is that welcome sound that comes faintly to my ears?" said Roy, in a heavy voice, as he mounted his wheel and followed his leader through the woods. "Is it what Byron calls the tocsin of the soul, the dinner bell? No; it is a cow bell. Push on, Joe. Who's got a cup handy?"

Their first hard work was to locate the cow which wore the bell, and their second to ascertain whether or not she would permit the boys to approach her on short acquaintance. They had no trouble at all in going straight to the little glade from which the bell sounded, for the path took them to it. There were half a dozen cows in sight, but they were evidently accustomed to having wheelmen intrude upon them, for they merely looked at the boys and went on with their feeding. The three bicycles were leaned against convenient trees, the cup Roy wanted was quickly brought to light, and

then Joe and Arthur began a cautious stalking of the nearest cow.

"That's no way to do business," said Roy, who brought up the rear with the cup in his hand. "Go straight up to her as if you had a secret to tell her, for if you go to sneaking she'll get suspicious and dig out. That's the way to do it, Joe. Now scratch her on the neck or behind the horns, and I'll soon have a cupful of that beverage which is the best of all drinks anywhere, and especially on the road. I declare, she's as gentle as an old cow, and it's going to be a good deal easier than I thought. Art, you had better lumber back to the bikes and bring two more cups. We'll have a jolly tuck-out on milk while we are about it."

In a few minutes more three hungry and tired boys, each with a brimming cup of rich country milk in one hand and a sandwich in the other, were sitting on the ground under the shade of a spreading beech, enjoying a substantial lunch and fervently thanking the author of their road-book for his timely suggestions regarding cow-paths and the kindly animals which made them. Of course it was

much better than any lunch they ever had at home, and they had but one fault to find with it; there wasn't enough of it.

"I move that we let that trout brook alone," said Joe. "We are not so hungry but that we can stand it until we reach the end of our day's run, and besides, we can find better angling nearer home when we have more time at our disposal."

"That's what I say," chimed in Arthur. "We've twelve miles farther to go, and I am in favor of setting out at once; for the longer we stay here the lazier we'll get. Let's follow the path until we get on the other side of those patches of sand, and then make the pace hot and get to Dorchester as soon as we can. We'll have to lie by to-morrow, for it's going to rain."

The clouds certainly looked threatening, and the prospect of being caught in a smart shower before they could reach the shelter of the hotel at which they intended to stop for the night, was enough to put energy even into Roy Sheldon, who was called the laziest boy in the party. He didn't want to be put

to the trouble of cleaning the mud off his fine wheel before he went to bed; so he led the way at a brisk gait, paying little or no attention to where he was going so long as the path was smooth and plain, and the first thing he knew he was brought up standing by a brush pile in front of him.

"This bangs me; now where's the trail?" was all he had to say about it.

"It has ended as nearly all trails do," replied Joe, quoting from one of his favorite authors and trying to get a glimpse at the clouds through the net-work of branches above his head. "It branched off to right and left, grew dimmer and slimmer, degenerated into a rabbit path, petered out in a squirrel track, ran up a tree and lost itself in a knot-hole."

"But I don't think I shall go up to find it," answered Roy. "It will be easier to take the back track."

And it was easier to say that than it was to do it, as Arthur Hastings found when he came to make the attempt. When the line faced about he became the leader, and before he had

gone a dozen yards he found himself at fault. The ground was so hard and so thickly covered with leaves that their wheels left no trail that could be followed, and as the bell had been left out of hearing they could not find the glade. To make matters worse, all the signs seemed to indicate that the cows which were pastured there had done nothing during the past year but travel about from one end of the wood-lot to the other; for the trails they had made were numerous, and twisted about in the most bewildering way. In sheer desperation Arthur turned into every one he came to, trundling his wheel beside him, and his companions blindly followed in his wake.

"This will begin to get interesting if we don't get out pretty soon," said Joe, glancing at his watch. "Night is coming on apace and we're twelve miles from shelter."

"But we are within easy reach of our blankets, matches and camp-axes," replied Arthur, "and if we have to sleep in the woods, it will not be the first time we have done it."

"But we haven't a bite to eat," groaned the hungry boy of the party.

At last Arthur fell back to the rear and gave place to Joe Wayring, who in his turn gave way to Roy; but one guide was about as good as another, for all the best of them did was to lead his companions farther from the road they wanted to find and deeper into the woods. There were paths enough, otherwise they would have found it impossible to walk as far as they did, for the bushes on each side were so thick that they could not have carried their wheels through them. But the difficulty was, those paths ran in every direction, and did not tend toward any particular point of the compass. The woods grew darker every minute, and at last, when they were beginning to talk seriously of making a camp and going supperless to bed, Roy Sheldon shouted out that he could see daylight before him, and presently the three boys emerged from the woods.

"I knew I could bring you out if you would trust to my superior knowledge of woodcraft," said Roy complacently. "I tell you, you

can't lose me in any little piece of woods like this."

"But what sort of a place have you brought us to with your superior knowledge?" exclaimed Arthur. "This isn't our road."

"I didn't say it was, my friend," was Roy's reply. "I simply said I had brought you out of the woods."

"Only to lose us again," chimed in Joe. "This is a railroad."

"And a one-track concern at that," said Arthur. "Crooked as a ram's horn, so that we can't see a train until it is close upon us, and consequently dangerous. It's been raining hard here. The ditches on each side are full of water."

"Which means muddy wheels to clean to-night in case a train drives us off the track. Shall we try it?"

"Of course. But which end of the road will take us to our destination? That's what I should like to know."

"Ask us something easy," answered Joe, as he lifted his wheel over the ditch and placed it upon the track. "Dorchester must be at

one end or the other, but we'll have to go it blind. Which way shall we start?" added Joe, who while he was speaking kept turning his wheel first up and then down the track. "The majority rules."

"That way," said Roy.

"Come on then. Let's cover as many miles as we can while daylight lasts. We'll have to touch a match to our lamps pretty soon."

It was fine wheeling on the hard road-bed, and Joe Wayring made the pace hot enough to satisfy anybody but a professional racer; but fast as he went, the darkness traveled faster, and when they had gone about three miles, he suggested that the lamps ought to be lighted.

"These thick woods and high banks on each side shut out what little light there is," said he, "and it is darker where we are than it ought to be. We have never been this way before, and no one knows how soon we may blunder into a cattle-guard and get a broken head without a chance to see what hurt us."

Another start at a more moderate pace was

made as soon as the lamps had been lit, and by the time the fourth mile had been left behind, it was as dark as a pocket. This was a new experience, and the boys did not like it. Although they had often seen wheelmen running about the streets when it was so dark they could not tell where they were going, Joe and his chums had never tried to do it themselves, because they did not like to trust so much to luck. A small stone or a stick which some careless boy had left in the track might send them to the ground, and my master was not fond of taking headers. Thus far he and his friends had been very fortunate in avoiding any very serious falls, and they did not care to run any risk of spoiling their record. But Joe came within a hair's breadth of scoring a bad fall on this particular night. Although he thought he was paying especial attention to the road close in front of him, he was really paying more to the rippling of a brook that flowed through a yawning gulf on his right hand, and at the same time he was keeping a bright lookout for a locomotive headlight.

"That's an awful pokerish place over in there," Arthur remarked, jerking his head sideways toward the ravine of which I have spoken, "and the railroad seems to have been built on the very brink of it. Why didn't the engineers cut out more of the hill on the opposite side and put it farther—eh?"

A warning shout from Joe Wayring cut short Arthur's criticism, and brought him and Roy to a sudden halt. There was a rock lying on the track, and it was so large that it covered the rails on both sides. Then followed that hurried consultation which I have recorded at the beginning of my story. While it was going on Joe, with the aid of his lamp, examined the face of the bluff, and could distinctly trace the path made by the bowlder when it rolled down from the top, and the others took a good look at the rock itself. Two things were plain to them: The rock was on the track, and they could not muster force enough to get it off. The first train that came along would find it there, as well as a gulf of unknown depth ready to receive all the cars that were tumbled into it.

"Suppose it should be a passenger train?" gasped Roy.

"Or an excursion?" added Arthur.

Something must be done, and that, too, without the loss of a moment.

CHAPTER XII.

JOE'S WILD RIDE.

"BOYS, we've got to stop that train," said Joe, speaking rapidly but calmly.

"But how do we know which way it is coming from?" asked Roy, who did not show half as much pluck now as he did while he was struggling with the mate on board the White Squall.

"We don't know," answered Joe. "It's our business to find out. Art, you go back along the way we have come, and I'll go ahead. Roy, you stay here and be ready to signal either way in case anything happens to us and we don't succeed in stopping the train. Raise your lamp as high in the air as you can and lower it suddenly. That's 'down brakes' on the Mount Airy road, and I suppose the signal is the same the world over. At any rate an engineer with half sense will understand it. Off we go now. Don't be reckless of headers, Art, but speed along lively."

In two seconds more my master and Arthur Hastings were hurrying away in different directions, and Roy, having carried his wheel across the ditch and placed it against the face of the bluff, was sitting on the rock with his lamp in his hand. In another two seconds Joe and I whirled around a sharp bend and were out of sight of everybody.

That was the wildest and most reckless run I ever undertook, for my master did not by any means follow the advice he had given Arthur Hastings. When Joe Wayring went into a thing he went in with his whole heart. I went ahead faster that I had ever been driven before, but a tricycle could not have run with more steadiness. Joe did not need the whole road-bed to travel in as he would if he had attempted a fast gait a week before, but held me firmly in one track. I could plainly see the way for a short distance in front of me, catch the glimmering of the wet rails on each side, and hear the faint "swishing" sound made by the rubber tires as they spurned the ground under them; but all on a sudden this sound ceased —or, rather, it gave way to a very low rumble,

such as I had never heard before. The high bank on the left sank out of sight; the gurgling of the stream far below became a roar; solid walls of blackness surrounded us on all sides, relieved only by that little streak of light in front; and to my inexpressible horror I discovered that we no longer had the firm road-bed beneath us. We had left it, and were rushing with almost breathless speed over a trestle-work whose height could only be guessed at. An eight-inch plank nailed to the timbers between the tracks was our pathway. It was plenty wide enough for Joe, now that he had "mended his style of riding," if the plank had only been on the ground, and he had had daylight to show him where he was going; but there was plenty of room for accident. Suppose the plank should not extend entirely across the trestle, which was so long that I began to wonder if there was any other end to it! Or what if a tire should come off? Such accidents sometimes happen to the most careful bicyclists, and when I pictured to myself Joe Wayring lying stunned and bleeding among those timbers, and in danger of

slipping through into the rocky bed of the stream beneath while I toppled over the edge —when I thought of these things, I shivered so violently that my nickel-plated spokes would have rattled if they had not been tangent and tied together.

As for Joe Wayring, there was not the faintest exclamation from him to show that he realized his danger, although I knew well enough that he couldn't help seeing it. If his nerves had not been in perfect health, something disastrous would surely have happened. He struck the plank and passed over thirty feet of its length before he had time to take in the situation. Once started along the trestle he had to go on; there was no help for it. The light from the lamp was all thrown ahead, and an effort to dismount in the darkness might have resulted in a disabling fall among the timbers with me on top. Then what would become of the train, if it approached from the direction in which he was going? Plainly his only chance was to keep in motion; and Joe not only did that, but he laid out extra power on the pedals, and sent me

ahead with increased speed. The rails looked like two continuous streaks of light, and the timbers passed behind with such rapidity that they presented the appearance of a solid floor. So great was our speed that by the time I had thought of all this, and become so badly frightened that I would have tumbled over if my momentum had not kept me right side up, that low rumbling sound ceased as suddenly as it had begun, the graveled road-bed, trodden smooth in the middle, shot into view and came rushing under the wheels, two high bluffs came out of the darkness and shut us in on both sides, and the trestle and its terrors were left behind. At the same instant, as if by a preconcerted signal, a bright light appeared far up the track, which at this point was perfectly straight, and another still nearer. The first was from the head-light of the approaching train, and the second was emitted by a lantern in the hands of a man who seemed to be searching for something, for he held his light first toward one rail and then toward the other. He was moving away from us.

"It's the track-walker," gasped Joe, as he

sounded his bell; and those were the first words I had heard him speak since we left the rock. "Suppose I had run onto him while I was scooting along that narrow plank! I'd be dead now, sure."

The moment the man with the lantern heard the bell he faced about; but, to my surprise, he did not appear to be at all alarmed. The orders he straightway began shouting at us showed conclusively that he was used to wheelmen and their methods.

"Git aff the track, ye shpalpeen," he yelled, frantically flourishing his lantern in the air. "Don't ye see the kyars coming forninst ye, an' haven't I towled ye times widout number, that if ye gets killed ye can't get no damages from the company? Will yees git aff the track?"

"Stop that train," shouted Joe, in reply. "There's an obstruction on the track just beyond the trestle."

"What for lookin' abstruction is it?" inquired the track-walker, incredulously.

"A big rock," replied Joe; and seeing at once that he had a stupid, and no doubt an

obstinate, man to deal with, he did not neglect to make preparations to stop the train himself. He promptly got me out of the way and detached the lamp; and when he bent over so that the light fell upon his face, I started in spite of myself. He was as white as a sheet.

"Aw! G'long wid ye now," said the track-walker. "Don't I be goin' down beyant there onct or twicst bechune trains iv'ry blessed day of me loife for three years an' better? An' don't I know—"

"I don't care what you have done during the last three years, or what you know," interrupted Joe, as he ran back to the track and signaled "down brakes" with his lamp. "There's a rock on the track—What are you trying to do, you loon?" exclaimed Joe, hotly, as the man made an effort to push him away and take his lamp from him. "Let me alone or I will report you. There'll be a wreck here in a minute more, and you will lose your place on the road."

Although the man didn't like the idea of allowing an outsider to interfere with his business, Joe's words had just the effect upon him

that the boy intended they should have, and after a little hesitation he began signaling with his own light. Between them they succeeded in attracting the attention of the engineer, who called for brakes, and stopped his train within a few feet of the place where Joe and the track-walker stood.

"What's the trouble?" he asked from his cab window; and while Joe was explaining, the conductor came up and listened. The latter looked first at my master and then at me, and presently said:

"You didn't ride across the trestle, of course."

"Of course I did," replied Joe, "I couldn't have got across any other way. I would have been afraid to walk that narrow plank in the dark. How high is it above the water?"

"Sixty feet in some places, and the trestle is just half a mile long," answered the conductor. "Here, boys, put that wheel into the baggage car. Young man, you come with me, and I will take you to Dorchester."

"That's where we want to go," said Joe, surprised to learn that he and his friends had

been riding on the back track ever since they struck the railroad.

In obedience to the conductor's order I was hoisted into the baggage car, placed against a pile of trunks so that I could see through the wide-open door and the engineer pulled slowly ahead. I had little idea how far we had run after leaving the trestle, but we were fully five minutes in getting back to it, and much longer in crossing it. There seemed to be no bottom to the gulf it spanned. It was so deep that I could see nothing but the tops of the trees that grew in it. About the time we got to the other end of it the baggage-master, who had been leaning half-way out the opposite door, drew in his head long enough to remark to some one whom I took to be his assistant:

"There's a chap out there calling for brakes the best he knows how," and I straightway made up my mind that it must be Roy Sheldon. "This would be a bad place for an accident with such a trainful of passengers as we've got. There's the rock," he added, a moment later, "and it's as big as this car."

It wasn't quite as large as that, nor do I suppose it was even half as large as Rube Royall's cabin; but it was big and heavy enough to tax the strength of all the men who could get around it, including the engineer, fireman, conductor, all the brakemen, some of the passengers and two wheelmen. With the aid of levers and much lifting and pushing they got it started at last, and it went down into the gulf with a terrific crash. I heard the engineer say, as he climbed back into his cab, that if he had struck that rock going as fast as he usually did at that place, he would have demolished his train so completely that it would have taken a microscope to find the wreck.

"All clear," shouted the conductor. "All aboard. Pass along that other wheel."

"One moment, please. There's another man in our party who went down that way because we didn't know where to look for the first train," said Joe, waving his hand in the direction in which Arthur Hastings had disappeared. "He'll be back directly, and as we don't care to be separated, perhaps you had better leave

us here. We're just as much obliged to you, however."

"Has the other man got a lamp? All right. Jake," said the conductor, addressing the engineer, "keep a lookout for another wheelman a mile or so down the road. That'll be all right. Pile in."

Joe and Roy went into one of the passenger cars, while the latter's wheel was placed at my side against the trunks. The first words he uttered were:

"It's just dreadful to think of, isn't it?"

"Not so much so as it might be," said I. "If I had broken Joe Wayring's head for him while he was driving me at top speed across that trestle, then you might have had something to talk about."

"We've enough as it is. I know it might have been worse, and some unknown villains meant it should be. Roy Sheldon showed the marks to the engineer as soon as he got out of his cab."

"What marks?"

"Why, the marks on the rock. The engineer called the conductor's attention to them,

and together they made it up not to say a word about it in the hearing of the passengers for fear of frightening them."

"What in the world did the passengers have to be frightened about so long as Joe and I stopped the train and averted the disaster? They ought to be tickled."

"Well, they wouldn't be if they knew how that rock came to be on the track. You probably did not see the conductor when he threw some pieces of round wood over the brink into the ravine, but I did, and I know that they were the rollers that were used to bring that bowlder into place after it had been tumbled down from the bluff. There's train-wreckers in this country, I tell you."

Roy's bike was so excited over what might have happened if we had found that railroad half an hour later, that he could not tell a straight story; but this is what I managed to draw from him after much patient and ingenious questioning:

When Joe and I disappeared in one direction and Arthur Hastings and his wheel sped swiftly away in the other, Roy Sheldon seated

himself upon the rock with his lamp in his hand, and whistled softly, keeping time with his heels, for a full minute; then he grew tired of doing nothing, jumped off the rock and made a circuit of it, looking closely at it on all sides. It had cut a deep gash in the bluff as it came down, but Roy thought the ditch ought to have stopped it, because it was lower than the track. Somehow Roy could not bring himself to believe that it had come down with speed enough to run across a three foot ditch, up a hill that was eighteen inches high and six feet long, and stop so squarely in the middle of the track.

"There's something rather queer about it," soliloquized the young wheelman, as he moved around the obstruction. "Now, then, what's that?"

Just then something attracted his attention, and he bent over to examine it. It was the print of a foot in the soft earth at the end of one of the sleepers. Roy placed his own foot within it, and found, to his consternation, that it was at least a third larger than his shoe. Then he made another impression be-

side it, and the difference in size satisfied him beyond all doubt that he had not made that suspicious track himself. There were hob-nails in the track, and that proved that none of Roy's party could have stepped in that particular spot, for there were no nails of that sort in their foot-gear.

"This rock was put here for a purpose," said Roy; and when the thought passed through his mind the cold chills crept all over him. "There must have been a good many of them in the gang, for half a dozen men couldn't roll so heavy a weight out of the ditch unless they had something to work with. What's this and this, and those pieces of timber over there?"

The longer the boy continued his investigations, the more he found to confirm the alarming suspicions that had arisen in his mind. The objects that now attracted his notice were several pieces of round wood, with the bark scratched and torn from them, and as many sticks of timber that were likewise covered with wounds and abrasions. There were other large foot-prints too in abundance—in

fact the ground about looked as though a large party of men had been at work there for a long time—and presently the boy discovered marks upon the bowlder itself which might have been made with a spade or crowbar.

"Were we all blind that we didn't notice these things when we first came here?" said Roy to himself. "Probably we were so highly excited that we couldn't notice any thing except the rock. The fiends who put this thing on the track with the intention of wrecking the train ought to be hanged without judge or jury. I am glad I didn't know what I know now, for I wouldn't have had the courage to stay here alone."

Just then the thought flashed through Roy's mind that perhaps the would-be train-wreckers were concealed somewhere in the vicinity waiting for the time when they could descend into the gulf and complete their work, and that their evil eyes might at that very moment be fastened upon him, while they were discussing plans for getting him out of their way. If Joe and Arthur had known all this, would they have been so ready to dash off into the

darkness to warn the unsuspecting engineer of his peril? How easily one of those concealed villains could have tumbled both his friends out of their saddles with a shot from a revolver! And what had prevented them, when the boys first started away, from throwing from the top of the bluff an obstruction upon the track that would have sent both the wheelmen to the ground? No doubt it was because Roy and his friends acted with so much promptness that they did not have time to think of it; but hadn't they had plenty of time since then to recover from their surprise and plan vengeance? This fear almost unnerved Roy. He took one step toward his wheel, but the thought that passed through his mind was driven out as quickly as it came. Come what might, he would not desert his post. He would stay there and warn the train, if one of his companions did not succeed in doing it, and in the mean time if those scoundrels wanted a fight, they could have it.

Roy's first care was to put his lamp behind the rock out of sight, and his second to pull his bicycle case off his shoulder and take out

the rifle it contained. He had done considerable shooting with it since he had been on the road, although it had not yet brought him a young squirrel for his dinner. As often as he and his companions halted for a rest their little weapons were brought out, and Roy had learned by actual test that the one he owned could be depended on to shoot "right where it was held."

"Now I am ready for them," said Roy, taking his stand behind the rock outside the circle of light that came from the lamp. "If they advance along the road they had better make sure work of me at the start, for if they don't, some of them will get hurt."

If the train-wreckers were hidden where they could see him (and it was reasonable to suppose they were), they must have taken note of Roy's movements, and perhaps they saw that he had a weapon of some sort in his hands and was ready to defend himself. Be that as it may, they did not molest him, and the boy stuck to his post until the glare of the locomotive headlight fell upon him. The train was moving slowly, and that was proof enough that

Joe Wayring had warned it; but to make sure of it, Roy caught up his lamp and "called for brakes the best he knew how." The engineer was the first man to speak to him, and when Roy called his attention to the marks on the rock, the big footprints on the ground and the timbers that were scattered about, the brave fellow turned so white that it showed through the black on his face. He in turn told the conductor, and the latter at once threw the timbers into the ditch, and pitched the pieces of round wood into the gulf.

"Don't lisp a word of it," he said, earnestly. "We've got a heavy, packed train, and the folks would be scared to death. Young fellow," he added, turning to give Joe Wayring a hearty slap on the shoulder, "you have been the means of preventing a slaughter. I'll bet there isn't another wheelman in the State who can ride over that trestle."

"Haw, haw!" laughed Joe. "I guess you haven't seen many wheelmen, have you?"

"Or who would have the courage to attempt it in daylight, let alone a dark night like this," continued the conductor. "Why, man

alive, it's a very narrow plank that was put there for the convenience of the track-walker, and the trestle is sixty feet high and half a mile long."

"I am glad I didn't know that when I was going over it," was all Joe had to say in reply.

This is what I meant when I said a while ago that little things often bring about great events. I now know that my master was frightened out of a year's growth when he found himself on that trestle, but he had confidence and nerve enough to go ahead without attempting to dismount. It was that short interview with the strange wheelman that did it, and made Joe Wayring the steady rider he was that night. He knew as well as anybody that he "wobbled too much," but he supposed that was something every novice did, and that the fault would correct itself without any care or trouble on his part. But as soon as his attention was called to it he promptly set about "mending his style," and this was the result. He was glad of it now. It was the only thing that put it in his power to save the train, for on the day he encountered

that strange wheelman he could not have ridden fifty feet on an eight-inch plank at full speed without falling off.

By this time all the trainmen had come forward, accompanied by some of the wakeful passengers who wanted to inquire into the cause of this second stoppage, and by their united efforts the rock was tumbled harmlessly over the brink of the gulf and the engineer pulled out for Dorchester, keeping watch along the way for Arthur Hastings. He found him about two miles farther on, but the boy was not signaling, because the appearance of the train was proof enough that Joe had met and warned it. Arthur was surprised to see it come to a stop at the place where he got off the track, and to hear the engineer shout at him to chuck his bike into the baggage car and get aboard, for he was half an hour behind already. But he lost not a moment in thinking about it after he saw Joe and Roy beckoning to him from the platform of one of the passenger cars, and the train once more started on its way, this time moving at a rate of speed that gave me a faint idea of the crash that would have

followed and the fearful loss of life that would have taken place if it had come in contact with that bowlder.

This is the substance of the story Roy's wheel told me during the run to Dorchester, and the one to which Joe and Arthur listened while perched upon the wood-box in one of the crowded cars. The conductor could not give them a seat, for every one was filled with weary travelers who had slumbered serenely through it all, and who when they awoke at intervals, and looked with sleepy eyes toward the three dusty, white-faced boys behind the stove-pipe, never dreamed that one of them, a short half-hour before, held all their lives in his hand. The conductor knew it and could hardly find words with which to express his gratitude, although he tried hard enough. The young wheelmen conversed in whispers and looked frightened, as indeed they were; and Joe Wayring hoped from the bottom of his heart that no such responsibility would ever devolve upon him again.

"I don't know what you fellows want to go to Dorchester for," said the conductor, who

came into their car as soon as the train was fairly under way. "The place has a big name, but there are only three houses in it. There's no hotel at which you can stop. There is a boarding-house, but I tell you plainly that it will be of no use to go there, for old man Kane won't let you in. He says he can eat anybody who comes along, but he can't and won't sleep 'em."

"That's queer," said Joe. "The author of our road-book has been through here, and says he got the best kind of treatment at Kane's boarding-house."

"Oh, the old fellow sets a good table, and can be civil and obliging enough when he feels like it; but he won't get up after he has gone to bed. It's against his principles."

"Why do you stop at such an out-of-the-way place?"

"Because there's a horse railroad there that connects with a little town a few miles back in the country, and there are some people aboard who want to get off. The depot is always kept locked at night, and I am afraid you will have to bunk on the platform unless you will

go on with me. Will you? I'll bring you back."

The boys thanked him, but said they didn't think that was the best thing they could do. Their route ahead was laid out, and they wanted to stick as closely to it as they could. They were used to camping out, had warm blankets in their bundles, and would just as soon sleep on the platform as in a bed, provided old man Kane could be prevailed upon to give them a good breakfast in the morning.

"But there's one thing about it," said Joe. "Every wheelman in the State ought to be warned that if he intends to travel this route, he had better time his runs so as to pass through this contemptible little Dorchester in daylight, unless he is prepared to camp out."

Arthur Hastings thought it would be a good plan for one of them to state the facts of the case to the man who wrote the guide-book, so that he could have the warning put in subsequent editions.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOING INTO A HOT PLACE.

"WHERE have you started for, anyway?" inquired the conductor, after a little pause.

Joe replied that they had set out from Mount Airy to run across the State, and that when they reached the farther end of their route they would be about three hundred miles from home.

"I suppose your object is to have fun and see the country, isn't it?" said the conductor. "Now of course I don't know anything about wheeling, but I should say that you could not have selected a worse route. You'll see the wildest bit of country there is, but how much fun you'll have I don't know. After you leave Dorchester you'll get into the mountains, and then your road will be all up-hill."

"But the ascent is so gradual that we can

easily accomplish it," said Roy. "Our road-book tells us it is so very gradual that we will hardly know we are going up. We understand that there is plenty of sport in the way of hunting and trout fishing in the neighborhood of Glen's Falls, and we intend to take our first rest there, if we can find any one who is willing to board us for a few days."

"And if we can't do that, we shall camp out," added Joe. "We came prepared to do it."

"I don't know much about hunting and fishing either," said the conductor. "All I do know is railroading; but some of my friends used to spend a month or so about the Glen every year, and always came back with the report that they had had the best kind of a time. But I notice they don't go there any more."

"What's the reason they don't?"

"Doesn't your guide-book warn you that there are some fellows up that way you had better keep clear of?" asked the conductor in reply.

"It doesn't hint at such a thing."

"It ought to. How long since it was written?"

"Two years; but it has been revised since then."

"Couldn't it be possible that no change was made in this particular route—I mean the one you are now taking?" inquired the official. "A good many things have happened at the Glen during the last two years. To begin with, the town had over a thousand inhabitants, and now it has hardly a quarter as many. Take 'em as a class, they're a rough set up there. They are lazy and shiftless, hate work as bad as so many tramps, and would be called tramps if it were not for the fact that they have permanent abodes most of the year. The rest of the time they are in the woods shooting game in violation of the law."

"Are there no officers in the vicinity?" asked Arthur.

"Oh, there are officers enough, but they are afraid to do anything toward bringing the law-breakers to justice. You see the latter are in the majority. They steal timber as often as they feel like it, go through every logging

camp they find unguarded, and if you lodge a complaint against one of them, the whole band will turn in to clear him by false swearing, and then they will take satisfaction out of you by burning your mill, barn or house, and by shooting or poisoning your cattle. They're a fine lot, I assure you, and I shouldn't think you would like to go among them."

"What a splendid place that would be for Matt Coyle if he were on deck now!" exclaimed Roy. "Why didn't he hunt up that band—did you say there was a band of them?"

"Yes; and I have heard it is regularly organized, and that when one of them has to stand trial or give bonds to keep the peace with those he has threatened, he gets help from all over the county."

"Why didn't Matt hunt up that band and live among them instead of going to such a place as Indian Lake?" said Roy.

"Perhaps he wouldn't have got any independent guiding in that part of the State," suggested Joe.

"There are, or used to be, plenty of guides

up there," said the conductor, "but I don't suppose they get much to do now. A man who goes into the woods for fun doesn't pick guides from among a lot of fellows who will rob him the first chance they get. Of course there are some nice people about the Glen, and they will be glad to take you in if the Buster band will let them do it."

"What has the Buster band to say about it?" demanded Joe.

"Who are they, and where did they get that name?" added Roy.

"They are the ones I have been telling you about—the lawless people in the Glen's Falls neighborhood," replied the conductor. "They 'bust up' property when things don't go to suit them, and that's the reason they call themselves the Buster band."

"But what's the reason they will not allow any of the nice folks in town to board us if they want to?" asked Arthur.

"Of course I am not sure that they will object to any arrangements you may be able to make with the family whose name I shall presently give you, but I think they will,"

answered the conductor. "You see, Dave Daily, the leader of the band, was indicted for arson, and there's a warrant out for him now. He and a companion were arrested for stealing timber; but they got out of jail somehow (every one says they must have had help from the outside in order to do it), and that night the man who complained of them lost everything he had in the world. Everything that would burn went up in smoke, and his stock was either poisoned or shot. After that Daily and his friend took to the woods, and Daily is there yet, or was the last I heard of him; but the friend was run down by a Middleport officer who went up there for that purpose."

"That was all right," said Joe, when the conductor paused. "I wish he had caught Daily also."

"So do I; but it seems he didn't. What I was going to say is this: That officer went up to Glen's Falls on his wheel."

"Ah! That explains it, and the matter is perfectly clear to me now," said Arthur. "You think that Daily or his friends will think we are officers too, and that they will

tell this man to whom you are going to direct us—what did you say his name is?"

"I didn't say," answered the conductor, with a laugh. "But his name is Holmes, and he lives on the road you will have to take to reach the town. I don't know him personally, but my friends who have been there say he keeps the best house, and that he is the best guide for that neck of the woods. Yes; that is what I was thinking of. Some of the band will be sure to see you if you stop there, and they may—mind I don't say they will, but they may—send him word to get rid of you in short order. He'll have to do it, for the board you would be likely to pay him wouldn't recompense him for the loss of his cow, horse, or barn."

"Of course it wouldn't," replied Joe. "We'll state the case to him as plainly as we know how, if we can find him, and if we learn that your suspicions are well-grounded, we'll not ask him to shelter us."

"Well, if this isn't a pretty state of affairs I wouldn't say so," exclaimed Arthur, who was very much disgusted. "They must be a

brave lot up there to let a few lawless people keep them so completely under their thumbs."

"But don't you know that they are in the minority?" demanded Joe.

"Yes; and a big one, too," added the conductor.

"If the members of that Buster band don't work, how do they live?" inquired Roy.

"They don't live; they just stay. They all own a little land, and work it enough to raise a few vegetables, like turnips and potatoes, and a little corn. Their meat they get out of the woods. They will steal timber, and then walk up and sell it to the man to whom it belongs, and who is generally the owner of a saw-mill he can't afford to have burned down. They sell their pigs, and by various other shifts make out to keep themselves in tobacco and clothes. And between you and me," added the conductor, sinking his voice to a whisper, "I believe they had something to do with the rock you young gentlemen found on the track."

"Is *that* the sort of folks they are?" exclaimed Joe.

"Of course I can't prove anything against them, but I bet you that when I make my report, there'll be a detective sent up there to look into the matter. I understand that there are spies in that band now, working in the interests of law and order, and if the detective can only strike one of them, he may learn something. There's Dorchester," he continued, as a long whistle from the engine awoke the echoes of the woods, "and I must say good-by. I don't want you to forget that you have made a friend of every man on the road by—"

"We should think you a mighty queer set if we hadn't," Joe interposed. "It's all right. Any decent fellows in the world would do the same, of course, but it happened to come in our way. We are greatly obliged for the information and warning you have given us."

"You will change your route then?" replied the conductor, and the boys thought he looked relieved when he said it. "I was sure you would, when you knew what sort of folks they are in that section of the country. Good-by and good luck to you."

When the young wheelmen stepped upon the platform they shook hands with all the trainmen, who wished them a pleasant trip and no end of fun while it lasted, and then leaned their wheels under the eaves of the little building that served as warehouse, operator's office and waiting-room, and looked about them. The light that shone from the conductor's lantern, and from the windows of the horse-car standing upon the branch track, gave them a clear view of their surroundings, which were so cheerless that the boys wondered how any road-book maker could advise wheelmen to come that way, unless he wanted to have them fooled as he had been fooled himself. At least that was the way Arthur Hastings expressed it.

"He probably came through here in the daytime, when old man Kane had a good dinner ready for him, and everything looked different," said Joe. "He wouldn't have had so much to say in favor of Dorchester's boarding-house if he had passed through in the night and been shut out of doors."

"Are we going to let what the conductor said about that Buster band induce us to change

our route?" inquired Roy, who, as soon as the train pulled out and the horse-car disappeared down the branch track, began untying his bundle and taking out his blankets as if it were a settled thing that he and his companions were to camp right where they stood. "That's the question now before the house."

"I stand ready to yield to the majority, but for myself I say 'No,'" answered Joe.

"Hear, hear!" cried Arthur. "But it does look dark now that the lights have gone, don't it? To tell the truth, I wish that detective had not gone up there on his wheel. Somehow it brings to my mind all the stories I have read about the sudden and mysterious disappearance of men who have been foolish enough to wear blue blouses through the regions where the moonshiners hang out. Those interesting people think that every one who dresses in blue must be a revenue officer, and make it a point to shoot him from the bushes without troubling him with any questions."

"That's a cheerful way to talk to homeless boys who have nearly sixty miles of mountain travel before them," said Joe, driving his

knife into the side of the building and hanging his lighted lamp upon it. "That makes things look a little pleasanter, doesn't it? I don't know how it is with you, but I am tired and sleepy, and I'm going to lie down."

After fastening their wheels together with a couple of chains and padlocks, so that if any light-footed prowler happened along and carried one of them off he would have to take all, the boys spread their blankets upon the platform, and went to sleep. Just before he closed his eyes Arthur said he knew he would dream of that rock and a train tumbling over into the gulf, but he slept too soundly to dream about anything until he was aroused by the stentorian voice of old man Kane, the man who would eat anybody who came that way but wouldn't sleep him. As soon as he opened his doors he saw the wheels resting against the station-house, and came over to ask the boys if they didn't think it about time to get up to breakfast.

"All right," replied Arthur. "We'll be there directly. It was that jolly, good-natured face of his that deceived the author of our road-book, and made him think Kane was a

bully landlord," he added, as the man turned away to hurry up the breakfast. "If we had a piece of bread as big as a walnut I'd see him happy before I would show my face inside the house he keeps locked against belated wheelmen. No one will ever come this route by my advice."

But after he had bathed his hands and face in the cold water that came from the spring behind the house, drank two big cups of coffee, and eaten two boys' share of the excellent breakfast that was placed before him, Arthur did not feel quite so much disposed to growl at old man Kane. He voted him a number one caterer, and that was more than could be said of every boarding-house keeper.

While they were at the table they heard a train stop at the station-house, and after what seemed a long delay, they saw the horse-car pass the window with a lot of passengers aboard; but they thought nothing of it until they went into the office, which was also the sitting and loafing room, and stepped up to the desk to pay their bill.

"Put that back! Put that money back,"

exclaimed the landlord, almost fiercely. "Bless my heart! I've a good notion to come out from behind the desk and shake the last one of you boys, and I can do it too, old as I am. I've just heard about it. Why didn't you wake me up last night, instead of going to bed there on the platform?"

Roy tried to explain that they did not want to disturb him after he had gone to bed (he didn't say why), and that their blankets afforded them as soft a bed as they cared for, but the old man did so much talking himself that Roy finally gave it up. He listened while the landlord told that the men on the up-train, as well as the passengers they had seen go by the dining-room window, had brought a full report of last night's doings, and he wanted to give them a breakfast to pay them for it, because he would have felt bad if that train had run into the rock and been smashed up.

"I always did look upon wheelmen as a nuisance," said he, with refreshing candor. "They eat you out of house and home, and the fifty cents you charge 'em for it don't begin to pay for the damage they do; but now I

know that they ain't a nuisance. I've seen that trestle, and I say that the boy who can ride over it in the dark has got the right kind of pluck to make a man out of him some of these days. No, sir, I won't tax you a cent for that breakfast; but I want to see the chap that went over that plank. Which one was it?"

"It's nothing to make a fuss about," answered Joe, who knew that if he did not speak Roy and Arthur would. He thought the man would have something complimentary to say to him; but instead of that he pushed the register toward him with the request that Joe would draw a line under his name so that he (Kane) would know it the next time he saw it.

"Do you know what I am going to do?" said he, when the boy handed back the pen. "I'm going to show that name to every wheelman who comes along, and double-dare him to go up to the trestle and ride over that plank. If he'll do it, and prove that he does it, I'll give him all he can eat as long as he has a mind to stay."

It was right on the point of Roy Sheldon's tongue to inquire: "And will you expect him to sleep on the platform of nights?" But instead of that he said: "Then you will be bankrupt in less than six months if many wheelmen come this way."

Old man Kane declared that he didn't believe a word of it, and the boys went out on the porch and sat down to read over the day's route, and fix it firmly in their minds, so that they would not be obliged to refer constantly to the guide-book. It was a short one, only twenty-six miles, but it was all they would want to do in one day, because it was the worst part of the sixty-mile mountain road that lay before them. The next day's run would take them to Glen's Falls, which, so the book said, was just the place for a brain-weary wheelman to stop and take a few days' rest. But in order to reap the full benefit of it, he ought to go at once, before telegraph communication was opened with the rest of the world, as it certainly would be next year.

"As the book was written two years ago that means last year," said Joe. "Unless that

conductor was greatly mistaken, the town is as much secluded now as it was then."

"More so, and further away from telegraphic communication with the rest of the world," said Roy, "because that Buster band has driven every one away from there. Who knows but it will drive us away too? Let's get there and see."

Having taken leave of old man Kane and thanked him for the good breakfast he had given them, the boys mounted and rode away. Joe Wayring was right when he said that Dorchester probably looked more cheerful in broad daylight than it did in the dark. Although there were but few people stirring, and they were mostly section hands, and there was little business done except at train time, it was a pleasant spot, and one that many a sweltering city boy would be glad to get away to during his summer vacation. The guide-book said there was fine fishing in the neighboring ponds, and the boys knew that squirrels were abundant, for they heard them barking on all sides as they crossed the railroad and wheeled away among the trees on the other side.

This proved to be the hardest day's run so far, but the boys "took it easy," stopped beside every babbling brook they found, and long before the hands on their watches told them it was twelve o'clock, every crumb of the generous lunch that old man Kane put up for them had disappeared. The road was steeper than they expected to find it, the log bridges over the streams were not in the best of repair, and there were so many stones on the hill that any attempt at coasting would have been perilous. The house at which they intended to stop for the night, provided the owner did not object to the company of strangers, looked very cool and inviting when they came within sight of it. It was nestled among the trees at the farther end of a long bridge, there was a neat mill beside it, and the rumble of the machinery was just dying away as the boys drew up in front of the open door.

"Hallo!" said a voice from the interior, removing all doubts from their minds at once. "How many of you fellows are there, anyway? Went down to New London t'other day and saw as many as seventy-five or thirty

of you, all going somewhere, but you're the first to come our way this season. Alight and hitch."

"Thank you; but our horses stand without hitching," replied Arthur. "Will it be convenient for you to keep us to-night?"

The dusty miller, following his voice to the door, said it would not only be quite convenient, but he would be glad to do it, for he was lonely up there in the hills, and he and his family were always pleased to see new faces. The first wheelman who ever came that way stopped with him for a week, and promised to tell any who came after him to do the same. The miller was surprised when Arthur produced the road-book, showed him his name, and told him that they had had him and his house in mind ever since they left Mount Airy.

"And do you mean to say that you have come that distance with nothing but a book to guide you?" he exclaimed. "Now that is the neatest kind of a trick, ain't it? Well, come in and we'll get some of the dust off."

That night after supper, while they were sitting on the porch, the boys told Mr. Hudson

(that was the miller's name) that they were going on to Glen's Falls with the intention of taking a few days' rest there, and to their surprise and relief he did not say a word to turn them from their purpose, as they were sure he would have done if the people in that neighborhood had been the desperate lot that the conductor represented them to be. This led Joe to believe that the conductor had been misinformed, and I heard him say as much to his chums when the miller went into the house after his pipe.

"And don't you believe in the existence of the Buster band either?" I heard Roy ask him.

"Oh, there may be lawless men about Glen's Falls, and where in the world will you go amiss of them?" answered Joe. "But I don't, and never have, put any faith in that story about an organized band of outlaws who terrorize the country, and roam around destroying buildings and stock when things do not go to please them. Why, just think of the absurdity of it! How long would it be before the whole power of the State would be put forth to bring them to justice?"

"I never placed much faith in the tales I have heard and read of men being shanghaied and taken to sea against their will," said Roy, with a wink at Arthur; "but I do now."

"I don't blame you," answered Arthur, "and we may be quite as willing to swallow all we have heard about that Buster band before we are a week older. I don't think that conductor meant to fool us, but he certainly did exaggerate things and make mountains out of mole-hills."

I had hoped so all along, and now I began to be sure of it. You can imagine, then, how astounded and frightened I was when I heard the miller say to his wife, after Joe and his friends had gone upstairs to bed:

"I really wish those boys would keep away from Glen's Falls, for I am afraid they will get into trouble if they do not. I suppose I ought to tell them about the Buster band, who make targets of the officers of the law, and destroy the houses of those who complain of them, but, Mollie, I am afraid to do it. Every dollar I have in the world is invested right here beside this little stream of water, and if I tried to put

the boys on their guard, and they should go up to the Falls and repeat what I said to them, how long do you think my buildings would stand? They're strangers to me, and I don't know how far to trust them."

"And don't you remember that the detective who arrested that friend of Dave Daily's came up here on a wheel?" said Mrs. Hudson. "And haven't the band said that every man who comes into the country on a wheel can make up his mind to go out of it on foot? I think myself that your safest plan is to keep still. If you knew the boys could be depended on, the case would be different. I'm almost sorry you agreed to keep them all night."

"So am I," said the miller. "I don't believe I shall ever do the like again."

I shivered all over as I leaned against the side of the house and listened to this conversation. If my master had heard it, I am sure he would have turned back and given Glen's Falls a wide berth.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARTHUR'S READY RIFLE.

KNOWING nothing of the fears that disturbed the minds of the miller and his wife Joe and his friends slept soundly, and after an early breakfast resumed their journey with light hearts; but there was something in Mr. Hudson's manner, more than in his words, when he bade them good-by that made the boys wonder if he had anything on his mind that he was keeping from them.

"You've had the best kind of luck so far and I hope it may continue; but I don't know," said he, kicking a pebble out of the path. "Looks to me as though wheeling through a country that you are not acquainted with, and going among people you don't know anything about, is mighty risky business. If I was your folks, I'd be sort o' uneasy till I saw you safe back."

"I don't know whether we've had the best kind of luck so far or not," said Arthur, as the three lifted their caps to the miller's wife and wheeled away. "What would he say if he knew about Roy's long swim in New London harbor?"

"Or about Joe's wild ride over that trestle?" chimed in Roy. "Of course he had good luck in getting over without a broken head, but it was bad luck that brought him into the scrape."

"Mr. Hudson probably had reference to the dangers of wheeling, and not to anything else," replied Joe. "I wouldn't give a cent to go on a trip of this kind if we did not pass through a strange country and see new faces at every mile of the way. Now for a coast; the first we have had since we struck this lovely road. Look out for heads everybody."

"And for the corduroy bridge at the bottom of the hill," added Arthur, quoting from the guide-book.

The latter faithfully warned them of all the bad places that were to be found in the road when its author passed that way two years

before, but it was silent on the subject of some things that were more to be feared than sticks, stones, and corduroy bridges. They encountered two of them about three o'clock that afternoon, when they thought they ought to be within a mile or two of Glen's Falls. Joe Wayring, who was leading the way, was the first to discover them. They were vagabond dogs which came slowly out of the thick bushes on one side of the road, dragging after them something that proved to be the carcass of a freshly slaughtered sheep.

Now if there was anything in the world that Joe was afraid of it was an ugly dog; and that these brutes were ugly as well as bold (if they hadn't been bold they would not have killed that sheep in broad daylight) was quickly made apparent. The minute Joe came within sight of them he sounded his bell, whereupon the dogs dropped their prey and raised their heads; but instead of taking themselves off, as my master thought they would, they stood their ground, snarling and showing their white, gleaming fangs as a welcome to the advancing wheelman.

"By gracious! They want a fight!" exclaimed Joe.

"All right. They can have it," replied Roy. "Sheep-killing dogs have no rights that any one is bound to respect, and these villains have been caught in the act."

"Down with them," cried Arthur, whipping his ready rifle from its case before his wheel fairly came to a standstill. "We've more right to the road than they have, and if they won't let us go by—"

"Don't do anything hasty," interrupted Joe. "Think of the reputation of the people to whom these brutes undoubtedly belong, and bear in mind that we've got to go through Glen's Falls or turn back."

"We haven't come almost fifty miles over the worst road in the United States to be turned back now," answered Roy. "Did anybody ever see uglier looking things, I wonder?" he added, as the two yellow, stump-tailed dogs, with their dripping lips raised, and their short ears laid back close to their heads, crouched upon the body of the sheep like panthers preparing for a spring. "Let's see

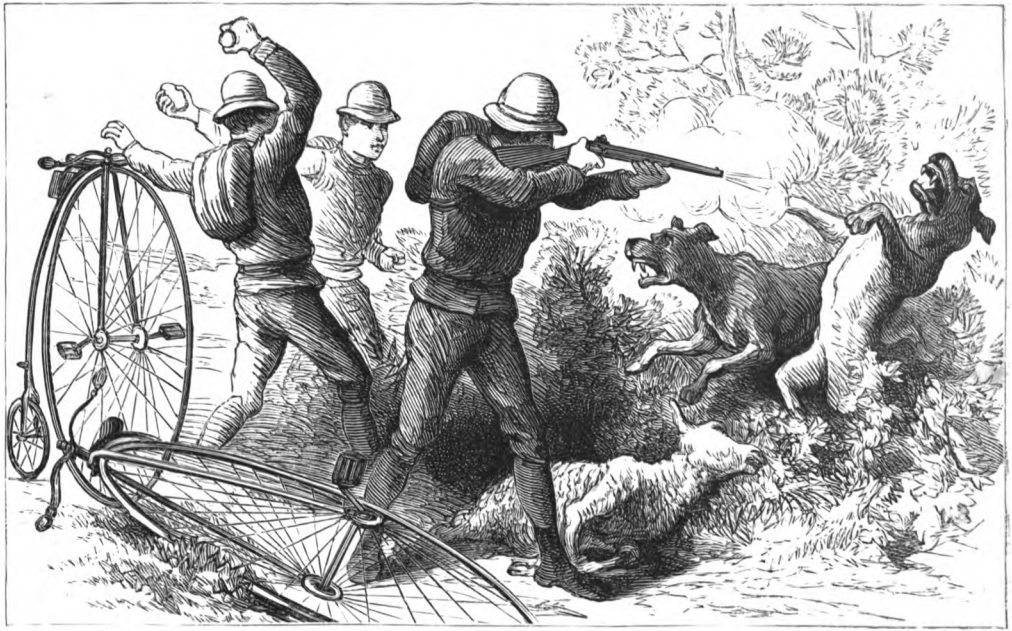
what effect a stone will have upon their courage."

By this time the young wheelmen had dismounted; they had to, for the savage beasts had possession of the road. There was room enough on one side to run by them, and Joe and his friends would have made the attempt if they had had any reason to suppose that the dogs would remain close to the sheep while they were doing it; but that would be taking too much risk. If the dogs jumped at them while they were going by, no matter whether they succeeded in laying hold of one of their number or not, they would be pretty certain to throw somebody from his saddle, and then there would be trouble. The unfortunate sheep's throat looked as though it had been cut with a knife, and that proved that their long teeth were sharp. Joe and Authur were not in favor of beginning a fight with the dogs, hoping that if they were left alone they would drag the sheep across the road and into the woods on the other side; but before they could say or do anything to prevent it, Roy Sheldon made one of his sure, left-hand shots; a heavy stone

took one of the canine vagabonds plumb in the mouth and tumbled him over backward.

"Whoop-pee! That was a bully shot, Jakey," yelled Roy, recalling some of the incidents of the first battle he and his chums had with Matt Coyle and his family. "Throw another, Jakey. Great Scott! They're coming for us."

That was plain enough to boys who could see as well as Joe and Arthur could. The stone certainly had an effect upon them, for they no longer stood on the defensive. They charged at once, the stricken brute leading the way, and his companion keeping close at his heels. I tell you the sight they presented was enough to frighten anybody, unless his nerves were made of steel, as mine were, but we did not run. I couldn't without help, and Joe and his chums wouldn't. In less time than it takes to tell it one of the charging brutes was knocked flat by a second stone from Roy's unerring hand, and the other fell with a bullet in his brain, shot fairly in the eye by Arthur Hastings's pocket rifle. But the death of his companion and the crack of the cartridge did



THE DEATH OF MATT COYLE'S DOGS.

not take the fight out of the surviving dog. Almost stunned as he was, he sprang up again in an instant, only to be floored by Joe Wayring. A second later Arthur's little rifle spoke again, and this time the dog did not get up. He was as dead as the sheep he had helped pull out of the bushes.

"This is rather ahead of my time," said Joe, who was the first to speak. "I never dreamed that domestic dogs could be so savage. Why, a couple of wild-cats or panthers couldn't have made a worse fight, nor frightened me more," he added, lifting his cap and wiping the big drops of perspiration from his forehead. "I hope this is the last of it, but I'm afraid it isn't."

Before Joe's friends had time to ask him what he meant, or to recover from the nervousness into which they had been thrown by the sudden onset of the sheep-killers, they heard a great crashing in the bushes, which were so thick on both sides of the road that one could not see any object in them at the distance of ten feet, and a heavy voice called out:

"So you've come again, have you? Three

on you this time 'stead of one. All right. I'll be there directly. I'm coming jest as fast as the bresh'll let me."

"There comes the owner of these dogs," said Joe. "Now we are in for it sure."

"Who cares?" replied Roy. "If he thinks we are going to stand still and let his ferocious dogs eat us up, he don't know us; that's all."

Meanwhile the noise in the bushes grew louder, and now a tall, heavily built man forced his way out and stepped into the middle of the road.

"Come again, have you?" was the way in which he greeted the boys. "And brung two fellers with you to help. Wal, you'll need 'em all. Take me, if you want to. See!" he went on rapidly, laying his rifle upon the ground and standing erect with his arms spread out as if to show that he had no other weapon about him. "I'll put my shooting-iron outen my hands and ask you again to take me if you have come here for that purpose. I double-dare you to lay a finger on me. Come now!"

A blind man could have told by the tones of

his voice that the new-comer was "as full of mad as he could hold"; so very angry in fact, that he scarcely took two looks at the boys to whom he was talking until after he had laid down his rifle and spread out his arms. When he saw that he was confronting a trio of boys, and not bearded men, he dropped his hands and gave utterance to two emphatic words; but as they were swear-words I don't repeat them.

"Who did you think we were?" inquired Joe, who saw at once that the broad-shouldered backwoodsman had make a mistake.

"I took you for jest what I thought you was—the detective that come up here on one of them two-wheeled wagons and run my pardner to earth like a woodchuck in his hole," said the man, nodding at the bicycles. "But you ain't, be you?"

"Of course we are not officers," answered Roy. "We are tourist-wheelmen traveling for pleasure."

"Oh," said the man, in a rather doubtful tone, as if he did not quite understand what the boys were, after all. Then he turned his

head over his shoulder and shouted at the woods: "It is all right, boys, and you can come along without shooting. You see," he went on, as another crashing in the bushes told Joe and his friends that there were more men coming, "I seen you from my place up there on the mounting when you crossed over the brook below, and I was kinder laying for you. Understand? These here fellers are pardners of mine," he continued, as two stalwart woodsmen presented themselves to view. "They was laying back there in the bresh where they had a fair squint at you; if you'd a put a finger on to me when I dropped my rifle and told you to come on, some of you would have been deader now than them dogs you plumped over. What did you do it with? I heared something pop like a gun-cap, and over them dogs went."

Arthur Hastings handed over his rifle because he held it in plain sight, and did not think it would be prudent to do anything else. The man seemed to grow friendly as soon as he was satisfied that the boys were not detectives who had come to the mountains for the purpose

of arresting him, and Arthur was afraid that if anything were done to excite his rage, he might become as savage as the dogs from whose fangs he and his chums had been saved by his good shooting.

The man took the pocket rifle with many exclamations of wonder and amusement, and while he and his "pardners" were giving it a good looking-over, Arthur and his friends improved the opportunity to take an equally close survey of the mountaineers; but there was some apprehension mingled with their curiosity, for they knew, as well as they knew anything, that they were in the presence of some of the Buster band. The first one who showed himself was Dave Daily, the leader of the band, who had been in hiding for a year or so to escape arrest.

"That's a mighty cute little trick of a gun," said the latter, when he handed back the pocket rifle. "But you wouldn't like to bet a dollar that she can beat my deer-killer at the distance of a hundred yards, would you? No, I don't reckon you would, because you would be certain sure to lose your dollar. Do you

know who's talking to you?" he added, abruptly.

Joe replied that they not only knew his name, but that they had heard something about him down at Dorchester; and then he wondered why the man did not say something about the dogs that were lying in plain sight. Did they belong to him, and was he going to raise a fuss with his friend Arthur for shooting them? If he did, there would be but one way out of the scrape, and that was to pay the man every cent he chose to demand for the worthless brutes.

"I'll bet you didn't hear nothing good about us down Dorchester way," said Daily, for it was he. "But I'll tell you what is a fact: We're not the terrible chaps that some folks would try to make you think we are. So long as everybody minds their own business and lets us alone, so long do we mind our business and let other folks be. Set down a while," he added, growing communicative, "and I'll tell you jest how the fuss commenced in the first place."

There was nothing for it but to comply with

this request, for Daily did not look or speak like a man who would take "no" for an answer unless he felt like it. So the boys leaned their wheels against convenient trees, seated themselves by Daily's side under the shade of another, while his two friends stretched their heavy frames upon the leaves close by, and the leader went on with his story.

"Us and our folks was raised right here in this neck of woods, we've always lived here, and we don't know no other country outside," said he. "We never had no fuss with nobody so long as we was let alone. We cultivated our little craps, shot our meat in the woods when we wanted it, ketched our trout in the brooks, sot lines through the ice for pickerel in winter, went to school when we wanted to, and were happy like the Injuns was before the white man come to this country and drove them out. First thing we knew, some fellers down in Washington, wherever that is, kicked up a war with somebody else, and sent word to our folks that they'd got to come and help fight it out. Well, they wouldn't do it, our

folks wouldn't, because it wasn't their fight, they hadn't no hand in getting it up, they didn't care which one whipped, and so they said they'd stay to home. Then what does them big fellers in Washington do but send an officer of some sort up here to take down the names of all of us, except the little boys, so't they could be drafted into the army. Our folks told him he wasn't wanted here and that he'd better go home, but he wouldn't, and so they run him out and everybody like him who came here afterwards."

"In short, you resisted the draft," said Joe.

"You're right we did, and we'll do it again," said Daily, in savage tones. "Whenever we raise a fight amongst ourselves, we stick to it till one or t'other gets licked; but we don't take up outsiders' quarrels. Well, that was where the fuss commenced, and for as much as four years our folks had to keep hid in the mountings so't them drafting officers couldn't get a hold of 'em. When the war was over we thought we should have peace and be let alone like we was before; but we

wasn't. Some smart Alecks, who had been elected to go to the Capital, and who had never been up here, passed a law—without once asking us, mind you—that deer shouldn't be killed at such and such times; that trout mustn't be ketched only jest when they said so; and that if we didn't give some heed to them laws, they would take us up and put us in jail. Well, they tried it, and how did they come out? Tell me that, will you?"

"At the little end of the horn," said one of the "pardners," who had thus far kept silent.

"You're right they did, Spence; at the little end of the horn," exclaimed Daily. "And that's the way everybody will come out who takes it upon himself to make laws for us. We're free Amerikin citizens and we mean to keep so. We don't ask no outsiders to make laws for us, because we can take care of ourselves. We kept right along jest as we had always been doing, shooting deer whenever we wanted the meat (violating the law they called it), and one night Zeb Harris and me was took outen our beds and slapped into the jail down

at Machias. You see we didn't have no jail up here at Glen's Falls, because we never needed such a thing. We knew well enough who it was that complained of us, for our friends kept us posted; so I writ him a little letter telling him what Zeb and me allowed to do as soon as we got out. We did get out pretty quick, and somehow everything happened to him jest as we said it would. While I was in jail I writ to the papers about it, so't the folks outside could know how we had been treated and trod upon, and all my pieces was published jest as I writ 'em. Don't believe it, do you?" said Daily, thrusting his hand into an inside pocket and pulling out a greasy notebook. "I want you to understand that I can write as well as anybody, even if I haven't had much schooling, and when it comes to poetry, I don't give in to no living man on top of the broad earth. Look at that, and see if you can beat it with all your education."

As Daily said this he placed in Roy Sheldon's hands a clipping from a newspaper, with the request that he would "read her out loud so't everybody could hear it." The boy

found that it was going to be a task to read it at all, for the paper had been so often and so roughly handled that in some places the words were quite obliterated. The poem, if that was the right name for the chief law-breaker's effusion, was nearly a column in length, and it required no little effort on Roy's part to make out the first two verses of it. They ran as follows:

"it was in the town of glens fals
as you shal understand
thair lived a crowd of young men
thay was cald the buster band
and thay was accused of menny
a bad deed let them be gilty or not
but thay hunted deer the year round
and for the wardens made it hot

thair was one young man among them
the wardens all knew wel
and by this felows rifl
thair was menny a fine deer fel
he hunted upon an old stream
i would have you all to know
and sed that that was one place
the wardens dast not go"

"What was the reason the wardens dared not go there?" inquired Arthur, when Roy handed back the paper declaring that the letters were so dim he could not make sense

out of the rest of it. "What were they afraid of?"

"Of me. I was up there," answered Daily, who seemed to think he had done something very brave when he concealed himself in the woods and sent word back to the settlement that he would fire upon the first officer who came along his trail to arrest him. "I tell you it wasn't healthy around where I was about that time for anybody but me and my friends. If you don't believe it, read that."

With the words another choice bit of composition was thrust into Roy's hand. It proved to be a warning to one of the recently appointed wardens that the Buster band, having "commenced the fun" by burning the house of the man who had dared to enter complaint against Dave Daily and his friend Zeb Harris, would keep it up by visiting the home of the warden if he did not at once throw up his office and let unlawful deer-hunters alone. There was still a third clipping which proved of more interest to the boys than either of the others, for it related to the detective who had come to Glen's Falls on his wheel. It was

addressed to the very man whose house they had intended to make their headquarters during their stay at the Falls. It ran thus:

"Mr. Jon Homes:—if you keep that black whiskered felow with the nee britches about your house any longer you will have roast pig to and in short order we know he is a detektive be cause he has been talking with one of our boys who he thinks is a spy on us in the pay of what you call the law and order sosiation but thair ant no spies amongst our crowd i want you to understand git rid of him for if you dont you will be burnt out before a week goes by we have started the fun and we will keep it up we mean bisness git rid of him and your all rite if you dont down she comes by the time you git this we shal have taken some of your stock as proof that we mean bisiness. from a frind remember."

By the time Roy Sheldon had finished reading this precious document he and his two friends were so angry that they could scarcely refrain from telling Dave Daily what they thought of so mean and cowardly a villain as these productions of his proved him to be. Joe Wayring showed very plainly that he

had had quite enough of this nonsense. He got upon his feet, brushed the leaves from his clothes, and remarked that it was high time he and his chums were moving.

"What's your hurry?" inquired Dave. "You can't find no better company than we be anywhere about the Falls. Where do you stop when you get there, seeing there ain't no hotel to put up at?"

"We're not going to put up at the Falls," replied Joe. "We shall stop there just long enough to buy a glass of milk or beg a drink of water of somebody, and then we shall take to the road for a ten-mile run before dark."

"Those dogs over there," said Roy, jerking his head toward the prostrate animals, "disputed the right of way with us, and when I tried to drive them out of the road they came at us with such fury that we had to shoot them in self-defense. I hope they don't belong to any of you?"

Roy said this, not because he cared a straw who owned the worthless curs, but for the reason that he felt some curiosity to know why

Daily and his companions were so very indifferent regarding them and their fate. He had looked for a row the minute the men saw the bodies of the four-footed vagabonds; but instead of that, the woodsmen had not referred to the matter since they asked to see the weapon with which the shooting was done.

"No; the dogs don't belong to none of us nor the sheep, neither," answered Daily. "Do you see them letters on the critter's head all mixed up together? That's Holmes's mark, and them dogs or any others are welcome to kill all the sheep he's got, for all we care. We don't like him none too well, for he harbored that detective till we told him to shove him out, and he would be one of the wardens if he wasn't afraid. Matt'll be staving blind mad when he hears of it, and mebbe you'd best keep outen his way when you get started, for he'll make you pay ten times what the critters was fairly worth. He sets a heap of store by them, for he brought 'em up here for watch-dogs to tell him when there was anybody coming to his shanty."

"Did you say *Matt* would be mad?" asked Joe, with a strange look on his face. "Matt who? What is his other name?"

"His whole name is Matt Coyle," replied Daily.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. HOLMES'S WARNING.

THIS was a surprise, and for some reasons it was a most disagreeable one. Of course Joe Wayring and his chums were not sorry that their old enemy, Matt Coyle, had escaped with his life when the canvas canoe was snagged and sunk in Indian River, but they were sorry that they had stumbled upon him in this unexpected way. Beyond a doubt Matt's failure to make himself master of the six thousand dollars that had been stolen from the Irvington bank, taken in connection with the loss of all his worldly goods and the imprisonment of his wife and boys, had had an effect upon him, and if such a thing were possible, Matt hated Joe and his friends with greatly increased hatred. The fact that the boys were in no way to blame for his misfortunes would not make the least difference to Matt Coyle. His bad luck began on the very day he made

the acquaintance of the Wayring family, he looked upon Joe as his evil genius, and the young wheelmen knew well enough that unless they got out of the Glen's Falls neighborhood before Matt learned they were there, they would surely find themselves in trouble of some sort.

"His whole name is Matt Coyle," repeated Daily. "He was the best guide, boatman and hunter down the Injun Lake way, but for some reason or other the rest of the men who were in that business didn't take to him, and so they clubbed together and drove him out. That wouldn't have been so very hard on Matt, for Ameriky is a tolerable big country and there's plenty of places for a guide and hunter to go; but they had to go and smash up everything he had so't he couldn't stay. They even took all his money and his rifle and clothes away from him, and turned him out to starve. He made his way up here by accident, and he's been living with us ever since. He's a good chap, and when he told me his story, I said to him that if I was in his place, I wouldn't sleep sound till every man and boy who had had a hand in mistreating me was burned outen

house and home. Why, he lost six thousand dollars in hard money, Matt did; all the savings of years of honest work."

"But he knows a way to get it all back and more too," said one of Dave's partners. "We expect him home with some of the boys to-day, and when he comes we'll all be rich."

"Spence, you talk too much for a little man," said Dave, sternly. "Matt won't take it kind of you telling all his secrets. He warned us all not to say anything about it."

"Fellows, we must be going," exclaimed Joe. "I know that everything these men have to say is full of interest, but listening to stories will not take us to our journey's end. By the way, how far is the railroad from here? I mean the one that runs through Dorchester?"

"Fifteen miles, or such a matter," answered Daily. "But you couldn't never get there. The woods is so thick you couldn't take them wagons through. Your best plan is to stick to the road. Where did you say you was going to stop to-night?"

"If we stay here much longer we'll have to

stop in town," replied Joe. "We don't want to do that, so we shall keep going and get as close to a level country as we can before the dark overtakes us. Good-by."

This was a moment that all the boys had been looking forward to with many misgivings. Would Daily and his men permit them to leave when they got ready? was a question that had often shaped itself in their minds, and which would now be answered in a very few seconds. To their immense relief the men who had been ready to shoot them half an hour before, showed no disposition to molest them or their property. They might be thieves and law-breakers, but they were not highwaymen. They said "So-long" very cordially, and saw the boys mount and ride away.

"Now here's a mess, or will be if we don't make the best time we know how before night comes," said Arthur, when the first turn in the road took them out of sight of Dave Daily and his friends. "I don't know when I have been more astounded than I was when that outlaw pronounced Matt Coyle's name."

"Didn't that juryman say that he believed

Matt would some day turn up alive and as full of mischief as ever?" said Roy Sheldon. "And didn't we say that the Glen's Falls neighborhood would be just the place for him if he were on deck? Well, he's here. He must have had a time of it tramping all the way from Sherwin's Pond through the woods. But then I suppose he is used to such things."

"He is at home wherever night overtakes him," said Arthur. "But I shouldn't think he would stick to the woods when there were so many roads handy."

"Wouldn't he want to keep out of sight of the officers who were looking for the money he was known to have in his possession? So those six thousand dollars were the fruits of his honest toil, were they? And Matt was the best guide, boatman, and hunter in the Indian Lake country? That's news to me."

"It's news to all of us," answered Joe; "but, to my notion, there's worse behind it. Where has Matt been with those men who are going to make the Buster band rich when they return?"

"That's so," exclaimed Arthur. "Where

has he? I noticed you inquired the distance to the railroad, and that made me think you were disturbed by the same suspicions I was. Do you believe Matt and his crowd were down there, and that they had anything to do with the rock we found on the track?"

"I don't know what else to think," replied Joe. "It was the way those men acted rather than what they said that aroused my suspicions. Matt has been rich once, that is to say, he has had the handling of more money than he will ever make by his own labor, and isn't it natural to suppose that when he lost it he set his wits at work to conjure up some plan to get more? A man who will do the things Matt Coyle has done and threatened, will do worse if he gets the chance. It's time that fellow was shut up. The next time he tries to wreck a train he may be successful."

This was all the boys had to say on the subject, but it was easy enough to see that they had resolved to put an officer on the squatter's track at the first opportunity. But then there was Tom Bigden, with whose doings I was by this time pretty well acquainted. Would

they want him disgraced by the revelations Matt would be sure to make if he were brought before a court to be tried for his crimes? As Roy Sheldon afterward remarked, a big load would have been taken off Tom Bigden's shoulders if Matt Coyle had never been born.

As soon as Daily and his men had been left out of sight Arthur Hastings began making the pace; and he made it so rapid that scarcely twenty minutes elapsed before they passed through an open gate and drew up before the back door of Mr. Holmes's house. They knew it when they saw it; and as they looked at all the evidences of thrift and comfort with which it was surrounded, they wished most heartily that Daily and all the rest of the Buster band might be brought to justice and that speedily.

"Boys, we'll not put this fine property in jeopardy by stopping here," said Joe, in a low tone. "We'd be worse than heathen if we did, and Mr. Holmes ought to kick us off the place for hinting at such a thing. Good-evening, sir," he added, touching his cap to a gray-headed man in his shirt sleeves who just then came around the corner with a bucket of water

in his hand. "Have you a pitcher of milk to spare, and can you give us a good big lunch to eat along the way?"

"Oh, yes, I can do that," replied the man, whose countenance grew clouded when he saw the boys getting off their wheels, but brightened again at once when he learned that they did not intend to ask him for lodgings. "Plenty of milk and provender to spare, but no beds made up."

"Mr. Holmes, we understand you perfectly," Joe hastened to reply. "We know just how you are situated, we sympathize with you, and we wouldn't stay in your house to-night if we knew your doors were open to us. We met Daily up the road a piece."

"You did?" exclaimed Mr. Holmes. "And did you tell him you were going to stop here?"

"We simply told him we should stop somewhere in town long enough to buy a glass of milk or beg a drink of water, and he raised no objection to it. I think you ought to know that Matt Coyle's dogs have been on the war-path again, and you have lost another sheep. Daily said it was in your mark."

"That's too bad; too bad," said the old man, who had long ago ceased to hope for better times. "If they keep on they will kill all my stock. The members of the Buster band don't always go into the woods after meat now. The pastures are handier, and a sheep, calf, or nice young heifer is easier to shoot than deer. We can't prove anything against them, and are afraid to prosecute if we could."

"Those dogs will never kill any more sheep for you," said Roy. "They wouldn't give us the road and we shot them. They're deader than herrings."

I noticed that Roy always said "we" when speaking of this little circumstance. If anything unpleasant grew out of it, he did not mean that his friend Arthur should bear all the blame or take all the punishment. Mr. Holmes's face grew bright again, but he showed a little anxiety when he asked :

"Did Daily see you do it, or does he know anything about it? Then I am surprised that he didn't make you pay for the dogs. Say," he went on, in a more guarded tone, "where are you going to stop to-night?"

Joe answered that they intended to camp in the woods, and hoped he could furnish them grub enough for supper and breakfast the next morning.

"Of course I'll do that," said Mr. Holmes. "But take my advice and don't light a fire. The owner of the dogs you shot is a savage. He gets around at night as well as in the daytime, and since he came here last fall, he has put more mischief into the Buster band than they ever had in them before, and that was quite unnecessary. They never thought of shooting stock for their own use before he went among them, but they often do it now. They seem to take delight in breaking open every door that is fastened of nights, no matter whether they want to steal anything or not. I'd give something to know positively what that man Coyle intended to do with the spades, crowbar and axes he took out of my tool-house the other night."

"What do you think he meant to do with them?" inquired Arthur, who thought from the way the man spoke that he had his suspicions.

"I'm almost afraid to speak it out loud, for it don't seem possible that any man can be so wicked," replied Mr. Holmes. "The lawless acts of the Buster band have driven nearly everything away from us, but we've got the post-office left, and last night I got my weekly papers out of it. In one of them I read that a terrible railroad accident had been averted by the coolness and courage of a wheelman who rode across a trestle in the dark to warn the engineer of an approaching train that there was a rock on the track."

"He rode over a trestle in the dark?" exclaimed Roy, who, impatient as he was to hear what else Mr. Holmes had to say, could not resist the temptation to torment Joe Wayring. "Now that's what I call pluck."

"That is what the papers call it too," said Mr. Holmes. "Well, when the trainmen came to look into things they found that that rock didn't get upon the track by accident, but had been dug out of its bed on the top of the bluff and rolled there. Since then that bluff has been examined by detectives in the employ of the railroad, who found there a couple of

spades, an axe and a crowbar all marked J. H. Those are the initials of my name, and they are on every tool I've got. They're in New London now, and if I thought anything would come of it, I would run down and look at them. If they are mine, that man Coyle was the leader of the gang who tried to wreck the train. At least he stole the tools, and I say he is the leader because the Buster band never would have thought of such a thing if he had not put it into their heads."

"How do you know he stole your tools?" asked Roy, in some excitement.

"Because I saw the prints of his feet in front of the door of the shop. They're as big as all out-doors, and his shoes are so nearly torn to pieces that it is a wonder to me how he can keep them on. Mebbe it's a little thing to build so much upon, but I know I am right," said the old man, earnestly. "If you could see that track once you would recognize it again the minute you saw it."

Now, when it was too late to make amends for the oversight, Roy Sheldon proceeded to take himself severely to task for not making a

closer examination of those big footprints he had seen about the rock. If Matt Coyle's track was there he could have picked it out from among the rest, for hadn't he and his companions taken a good look at it on the night Mr. Swan "surrounded" Matt's camp, and Matt crept up in their rear and stole all their boats? That "hoof" of his, as Mr. Swan called it, had "given the squatter away" on one occasion, and seemed in a fair way to do it again. Evidence that Matt was one of those who had tried to wreck the train was accumulating with encouraging rapidity. No doubt he and his gang had expected to bring a rich harvest out of that gulf after the sleeping passengers had been plunged into it, and that was what Daily's companion meant by saying that Matt would make them all wealthy when he came back. But what would they say when they learned that he had not brought a cent with him?

"Of course it is not my place to offer advice, Mr. Holmes," said Arthur, at length, "but I really think it would be a good plan for you to go to the city and look at those tools. If they

are yours you can say so, and may be the means of breaking up this nest of ruffians. There'll be a detective sent up."

"But I don't want one sent here," exclaimed Mr. Holmes. "I'd be afraid to have him around, for the minute he went away I'd lose everything I've got."

"He need not come near you," replied Arthur.

"And he need not come on a wheel, either," added Joe. "If he does, he may get some innocent tourist into trouble. Let him be a tramp or a fugitive from justice, if you please."

"That's the idea," interrupted the old man, excitedly. "Young fellow, your head's level. That would be his game, if he would only consent to play it, for fugitives and tramps are the ones the Buster band always receive with open arms."

"That is what I thought. Well, they have a good one now, and what's more, they must like him, for Daily said Matt was a fine fellow; or something like that," soliloquized Joe He did not utter the words aloud, for he wasn't sure it would be prudent to tell Mr. Holmes that he

and his two friends were better acquainted with Matt Coyle than anybody in the Glen's Falls country. If they could help it, the boys did not mean to tell who they were or where they came from, for fear that the information might reach Matt's ears in a roundabout way. He was glad when Roy said:

"Haven't we stayed here about long enough? If we want this to be our last night in the mountains we had better take to the road again."

"I guess you had," replied Mr. Holmes, reluctantly. "I never was guilty of so inhospitable an act before, except when I showed Daily's letter to the detective who was stopping with me and asked him what I had better do about it, and I would not be guilty of it now if I could do as I pleased. Remember my advice and go to bed in the dark; for if you don't I am afraid you will have visitors before morning."

The boys promised to bear the matter in mind, at the same time assuring the old man that it was no hardship for them to sleep out of doors, and Mr. Holmes hurried away to get

the pitcher of milk and have a supper and breakfast put up for them. Being apprehensive that some of the Buster band might be on the watch, hoping to collect some damaging evidence against the farmer that would warrant them in burning his house, Joe Wayring and his friends did not once venture across the threshold, although often urged, but ate a lunch and drank their fill of milk while sitting on the back steps. When the boys offered to pay for being so royally entertained, Mr. Holmes would not listen to it. By putting it out of the power of those sheep-killing dogs to do any more mischief, they had done him and all the rest of the law-abiding men in the settlement a kindness, and he wished they could stay there for a week so that he and his neighbors might show them how grateful they were for it. If any citizen of that region had shot those dogs, he would have been homeless before another week had passed over his head.

"I hope that Matt will not think that a citizen did do it, and proceed to wreak vengeance upon some one against whom he happens to hold a grudge," said Roy, as they moved swift-

ly out of the gate and turned down the road. "I still think that if Mr. Holmes and a few determined men would wake up and go about it in earnest, they could put an end to this reign of terror. I can't see why they don't try it."

But there was one thing that Roy and his friends did not know, and Mr. Holmes had forgotten to speak of it. There was not a single building in Glen's Falls that had a dollar's worth of insurance upon it. The risks had all been canceled at the breaking out of the war of the Rebellion, and there had been none taken there since. This was one thing that made Mr. Holmes and his neighbors so very timid.

The town of Glen's Falls was a dreary looking spot, as the boys found when they came to ride through it. There was a forest of fine shade-trees on each side of the wide principal thoroughfare, but there was grass instead of walks under them, and the buildings behind were rapidly falling to pieces. The evidences of former prosperity that met their eyes on every hand proved that there had once been

money and brains in the place, and that it would have amounted to something before this time if Dave Daily and the rest of the Buster band had been out of the way. They slaked their thirst at a pump on the corner of a cross-road and continued on their way without meeting a single person. If it had not been for an occasional head they saw through the windows of some of the houses they passed, they would have said that the town was deserted.

Their guide-book told them that the road that led from Glen's Falls through the mountains to the low country beyond was so plain it could not be missed, and perhaps it was when the man who wrote the book passed that way on his wheel; but it was not so now. Roads there were in abundance, and they all ran down hill in the direction the boys wanted to go; but they were filled with obstructions, and no particular one of them showed more signs of travel than another.

"I'd like to see the fellow who says he had a mile of the best of coasting along this road try his hand at it now," said Roy, seating himself on a log and cooling his flushed face with

his cap while he waited for one or the other of his friends to go ahead and take the lead. "I'm tired out, and if I was sure it would be quite safe to do so, I should be in favor of going into camp,"

"I don't believe he ever came along this road," said Joe. "We've got a little out of our reckoning, that's all."

"And not only are there no cows near by to give us a drink of milk, but we wouldn't dare go after it if there were, for fear of that villain Matt Coyle," groaned Roy. "Doesn't it beat you how that fellow keeps turning up?"

"And at the very time he isn't wanted," chimed in Arthur. "If you want to stop, all right; but don't let's stop here. I think it would be safer to go into the bushes and hide. I don't much like the idea of passing the night without a fire, but I confess that what Mr. Holmes said frightened me. I wish we might get a hundred miles away before Matt comes home and hears that his watch-dogs have been shot."

The others wished so too, but they hadn't energy enough to go any farther that night,

and besides the appearance of the road ahead of them was discouraging. It ran down a steep bank until it was lost among the trees and bushes as its foot, and probably there was another bank just as rough and steep on the other side of the brook which ran through the gully. They made the descent, and there they found a stream of water so sparkling and cold that the sight of it was more than they could resist. They carried their wheels into the bushes, making as little trail as possible, and at the distance of ten or fifteen yards from the road found a camping place; or, rather, a thicket that would be a nice spot for a camp when some of its interior was cut away so that they could spread their blankets. They did not use their camp-axes for fear that the noise they would necessarily make in chopping away the brush would serve as a guide to some one they did not care to see. They worked silently with their knives, and at the end of half an hour had as comfortable a camp as a tired boy would wish to see, if there had only been a cheerful fire to light it. They ate their supper in the dark, took a refreshing bath in the

brook, and then lay down with their blankets about them and their loaded pocket rifles close at hand. This was the first time they had found it necessary to adopt this precaution, and they hoped it would be the last.

About an hour after my master's regular breathing told me that he had fallen fast asleep, I was startled by hearing voices a little distance away. I could not tell which direction they came from, but I knew they were men's voices, and that they were angrily discussing some point on which there seemed to be a difference of opinion. I was still more startled when Arthur Hastings raised himself upon his elbow, shook Joe Wayring roughly by the shoulder, and whispered in his ear:

"Wake up, here. Matt Coyle's coming."

"Where?" asked Joe, who was wide awake in an instant.

"Coming along the very road we'd had to go up if we'd climbed the hill on the other side of the brook," replied Arthur. "Do you hear that? They're stopping for a drink. Reach over and give Roy a shove. Be careful to put

your hand on his mouth for he is apt to speak out when he is suddenly aroused."

Be careful maneuvering on Joe's part Roy was awakened without betraying his presence to the men, who had by this time halted at the brook, and then the three boys sat up on their blankets and listened.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO NARROW ESCAPES.

"I TELL you I feel so savage that I could bite a nail in two an' not half try," were the first words that came to the ears of the listening wheelmen. They were preceded by a long-drawn sigh of satisfaction, such as a thirsty boy sometimes utters when he has taken a hearty drink of water. "Seems to me that I can't turn in no direction no way but I find them oneasy chaps at my heels to pester the life out of me. They're to blame for me losin' them six thousand dollars of mine that I worked hard fur, dog-gone 'em."

How the boys trembled when that harsh voice grated on their ears. It was Matt Coyle's, sure enough. They had heard it so often that there could be no mistake about it.

"They was the ones that blocked this little game of mine, an' sent me an' the fellers hum empty-handed when we thought to come back

rich," Matt went on, growing angrier and raising his voice to a higher key as he proceeded. "I seen 'em as plain as daylight; an' now I come hum to find that they've been here an' shot them two dogs that I was dependin' on to keep the constable away from my shanty. Did anybody ever hear of sich pizen luck?"

"If you saw them there at the rock, what was the reason you did not drive them off so't the train could run into it?" inquired another familiar voice,—in point of fact, the voice of Dave Daily. The boys were surprised to know that he was there, and wondered if he had come out to meet Matt and put him on their trail. If he had, what was his object in doing it? Did he want to see them punished for shooting those savage dogs, or did he want to have them robbed?

"You say you and your crowd worked hard to get that rock down the bluff and onto the track, and yet you sot there in the bresh and let one single boy turn you from your purpose, which was to bust up the train," continued Daily. "He must have been alone,

for you say yourself that one of his friends went one way and t'other went t'other to tell the engineer to watch out. Why didn't you go down and pitch him into the ravine?"

"What would have been the good of doin' that, seein' that Joe an' Arthur had already went off?" demanded the squatter, with some show of spirit. "An' don't I tell you that he had a pistol or something in his hand."

Daily uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"'Twasn't a pistol nor nothing of the sort," said he. "It was a little pop-gun that wouldn't hit the side of a barn nor shoot through a piece of card-board. Before I would say that I was scared by a little thing like that I would go off and hide myself; wouldn't you, Spence?"

"Them pop-guns was big enough an' ugly enough to kill them two dogs of mine, an' I ain't got no call to face sich we'pons," retorted Matt, who, as you know, always took care to look out for number one. "An' here we've been hidin' around in the bresh fur most a week, fearin' the officers, when we might as well come hum to onct. That's another

thing that makes me mad. I do wish I could get my two hands onto them boys fur a little while, an' you fellers here to help me. I'd larrup 'em so't they wouldn't ever come nigh here agin, I bet you."

"I don't know whether you would or not," replied Daily. "I kinder liked 'em, and as long as they ain't officers—"

"That's so," interrupted Matt. "But they're jest the chaps to put the constables onto your trail an' mine. That's their best holt. Didn't you say that if you was in my place you wouldn't rest easy till everybody who had had a hand in mistreatin' you had been burned outen house an' home? Well, them are three of 'em."

"Now why didn't you say so?" demanded the chief of the Buster band.

"If we'd only knowed that, we'd a kept 'em for you," added Spence's voice. "Wouldn't we, Dave? Now that I come to think of it, the youngsters never told us who they was or where they come from, and we didn't think to ask them."

"They'd a lied to you if you had," said

Matt, and the boys judged by the sound of crunching gravel that he was pacing back and forth across the road like some caged wild animal. "That's the kind of fellers they be; an' now I'll tell you what's a fact: If you don't help me ketch them fellers an' hold 'em so't they can't get away till we get ready to let 'em, this country of your'n will be thick with officers afore two weeks more has gone by. That's the way it was down to Injun Lake."

"And this is what we get by taking you in and feeding you when you was nigh about dead, is it?" exclaimed Daily, in angry tones. "I bet you that the next tramp who comes this way will be kicked out before he has time to tell his story. You've brought some of our boys into trouble by talking them big notions of your'n into their heads, and telling how easy it was to smash a train and get thousands of dollars outen the pocket of the folks—Ugh! I can't bear to think of what fools we made of ourselves by listening to you. Now you clear yourself, before we make an end of you for good."

"I come here 'cause I had to go somewhere,

didn't I?" said Matt, in tones that were fully as angry and fierce as Daily's. "I'm sorry enough I done it, for you're not the men I took you for. You're willin' to stand here with your hands in your pockets an' let them rich folks tell you what an' when you shall eat."

"No, we ain't," roared Daily. "We're free Amerikin citizens, and we don't allow nobody to tell us what we shall do."

"Well, then, what makes you talk to me that-a-way?" cried Matt. "I come here to help, an' I've told you of more ways to bother the folks who want to make laws for you than you would have thought of in ten years' time. As fur puttin' that rock on the track, nobody suspicions who done it, an' we laid around in the bresh so't the officers, if any happened to be here, shouldn't see us comin' from t'wards the railroad. I'm free to say that I didn't want to go down to the track alone an' face the we'pon that Sheldon boy had in his hand (I knowed him dark as it was), but I offered to go if any one would go with me; an' they wouldn't. Ask 'em if it ain't so."

This proved to Roy Sheldon's entire satisfaction that he had done the right thing when he pulled his pocket rifle from its case, shoved a cartridge into it, and prepared to defend himself if the train-wreckers thought it best to attack him. It seems that they did watch him and discuss plans for getting him out of their way, but some of the timid ones among them saw the light reflected from the nickel-plated ornaments on his rifle, and could not muster courage enough to show themselves.

"Nobody don't suspicion that we put the rock on the track," repeated Matt, "an' that ain't why the officers will come here. You're the one who done the mischief — you, yourself. As soon as one of them boys began to let on that they knowed who you was, you showed them all the letters an' things you writ for the papers, an' talked to 'em like they was friends of your'n. You will find yourself in trouble all along of that nonsense, if you don't do what I say."

"That puts a different look on the matter," said Daily, in a much milder tone, "and, Matt, I'm sorry I jawed you that-a-way. Fact

of it is, I couldn't help it. We've been in a power of trouble and trib'lation ever since them rich folks down to Washington sent for us to go and fight their war for 'em, and then went and made laws against shooting deer and ketching trout, and we've got pretty well riled up. What do you think we had best do?"

"Nab them boys fust an' foremost," said the squatter emphatically. "That's the fust thing; then, after I have had my satisfaction outen 'em, by tyin' 'em to a tree an' larrupin' 'em with hickories, like I would have done with that there pizen Joe Wayring if them friends of his'n hadn't come up an' rescooed him — after I've done all that, I'll take a day off an' think what we'll do next. One thing is sartin: them boys must not be let go out of these mountings till their mouths has been shut about the Buster band in some way or 'nuther."

"Ketching of 'em is going to be the hardest part of the whole business," remarked Spence. "They skum along right peart after we let them go, and I b'lieve they are plumb outen the mountings by this time. If they are—"

"But they ain't, I tell you," Matt Coyle interposed. "It don't lay in no steam injun, let alone a bisickle, to get outen these mountings betwixt five o'clock an' dark. They're camped summers between here an' Ogden, an' all we've got to do is to circle round to our usual lookin'-out place an' stay there till we see 'em comin'; then we'll run down an' stop 'em. When I get my hands onto 'em they'd best watch out, fur I feel jest like poundin' 'em plumb to death to pay 'em fur stickin' that innercent ole woman of mine in jail. An' the boys too; the very best, honestest an' hardest workin' boys that any pap ever had. They're likewise shut up all along of that pizen Joe Wayring an' his rich friends."

These words were followed by the strangest sounds the boys had ever heard. If they had not known Matt Coyle as well as they did, they would have been sure he was crying.

All this while the men (and there seemed to be a large party of them) had been taking turns drinking at the brook; and having quenched their thirst they started on again with a common impulse, not along the road,

but up the stream on whose right-hand bank the boys were encamped. There could be no doubt of it, for there was no longer any crunching of gravel under the heels of their heavy boots, but the bushes snapped and swayed, and the voices came more distinctly to their ears. Matt Coyle was the one who did most of the talking. He did not seem to take his failure to wreck the train so very much to heart, but he bewailed the loss of his dogs, whose good qualities could not be enumerated by any one man, and asked who would warn him now if the officers came to his shanty some dark night to arrest him.

"They are coming this way as sure as the world," whispered Roy, drawing his feet closer to him and placing an elbow on each knee so that he could have a dead rest with his rifle. "Why don't the fools stick to the road? It's easier walking there than it is in the bushes."

"This is no doubt a short cut to their hiding-place," replied Joe. "Stand together, fellows, and we'll show them what we are made of. We'll give them fair warning, and

if they are foolish enough to disregard it, they will have to take the consequences."

"That's what's the matter," whispered Arthur, cautiously moving a little closer to his friends. "I'm afraid, but I'll never be tied to a tree and whipped; they can bet on that."

I can not begin to tell you how frightened I was as I stood there and listened to the voices and footsteps of those desperate men who were every minute drawing nearer to our place of concealment. Remember, I was utterly helpless. However good my will may have been, I did not possess the power to do the first thing to aid my master in the fight which I firmly believed would be commenced in less than ten seconds. And bear another thing in mind: If the young wheelmen were found there, and were overpowered and taken captive, the shooting of Matt Coyle's worthless dogs was not the only thing for which they would be punished. They knew Matt's secret. They knew that he and some of his party had tried to wreck a train. They had talked about it where the boys could plainly hear every word they uttered. Of course Matt would know it, if he

found them there in the bushes, and what would he do? How would he go to work to "shut up their mouths," as he had spoken of doing? I assure you this thought was enough to make even my steel nerves shake; and I believe it must have passed through Joe Wayring's mind and frightened him, for I heard him say, in a scarcely audible whisper:

"It's do or die, fellows. That villain will be wild with rage if he learns that we heard all he said to Dave Daily. If the worst must come, be sure of your man before you shoot."

That moment's terrible suspense is something I never shall forget; then the reaction came, and I felt as if I were going to fall in a heap like a piece of wet rope. There was a tolerably well-beaten path along the bank of the brook, but it was on the other side. Dave Daily and his gang of villains followed it, and that was all that saved us. If there had been a spark of fire on our side the brook as big as the end of your finger, I should have had a different story to tell. I was so confused that I could not pay any attention to their conversation, but I counted them as they passed

along in Indian file, and when at last they were out of hearing and Roy Sheldon spoke, I knew his count agreed with mine.

"Thirteen," was all he said; and then he lay down on his blanket and probably looked as nerveless as I felt.

"And at least half of them must have been with Matt," added Arthur Hastings. "I know it took six or seven men to roll that bowlder out of the ditch and place it on the track. Great Scott! Wasn't that a narrow escape!"

"I'd like to know how we shall come out to-morrow," said Joe, anxiously. "That 'looking-out place' that Matt spoke of must command a view of the road along which we will have to go to get to Ogden, and if we do not mind what we are about, Matt will meet and stop us there."

This was another thing the young wheelmen had to worry over, and taken in connection with the vivid recollection of the exciting scene through which they had just passed, it effectually banished sleep from their eyes for the rest of the night. And daylight was a

long time coming, as it always is when anxiously waited and watched for. They ate breakfast as they had eaten supper—in the dark—and when the birds began singing picked up their wheels and struck out for the road, which they found to be quite as bad as it looked on the previous evening. The first hill they encountered was a hard one, as they knew it was going to be, and when they gained the top they had to go down again on the other side. Of course the woods were about as dark as they could be, and it was anything but pleasant for the leading boy to feel his way while trundling his wheel beside him. But the fear of Matt Coyle's wrath and the hope of passing his "looking-out place" before the sun arose, drove them on, and to such good purpose that, by the time they could see to ride, they found themselves on a smooth, well-traveled highway. They did not stop to ask one another whether or not it was the road they wanted to find. It led away from the mountains, and that was all they cared to know.

"Away we go on our wheels, boys," sang

Joe; and suiting the action to the word he sprang into his saddle and set out at a lively pace. "Now, Matt Coyle, come on. It would take a better horse than you ever did or ever will own to stop us."

"But a stick thrown into the road might do the business for us," suggested Roy.

"You don't suppose Matt knows that, do you?" said Arthur. "Does anybody see anything that looks as though it might be used for a look-out station?"

Nobody did. There was nothing to be seen but a cultivated field on the right hand, a thickly wooded hill-side on the left, and a farm house in the distance. True there was a high, bald peak a little to the left of the hill over which the road disappeared, but it was all of ten or fifteen miles away, and a man stationed on its summit would have needed a good glass to make us out. At least that was what Joe Wayring said, and then he dismissed all fears of Matt Coyle from his mind, and made a motion with his hand as if to throw open the breech of his pocket rifle, which he had thus far carried in readiness for any emergency that

might arise, and remove the cartridge; but, on reflection, he decided to wait a little longer. It was lucky he did so, and that his companions followed his example.

If the Buster band really had a "looking-out place" anywhere within sight of the road I don't know it, but I do know that by taking short cuts through the mountains they managed to reach the highway in advance of us, for when we reached the top of the hill of which I have spoken, and the wheelmen were about to stow the rifles in their cases preparatory to a coast, Matt Coyle and Dave Daily suddenly stepped out of a thicket on one side of the road, and as many more ruffians arose from behind the fence on the other. They were about thirty yards away, and although all except Matt carried guns in their hands, I was relieved to see that there was not a club or stone among them. They supposed that all they had to do was to form across the road, call upon the boys to halt, and they would be obeyed.

"Them's the fellers—the very chaps I've been a-lookin' fur," yelled the squatter, shaking his fists in the air and striking up a war-

dance in the middle of the road. "Now I'll have the whole on you, an' there won't be nobody to interfere when I—"

"Full speed, boys," said Joe, in a low tone. "Hold fast to your guns and be ready to stop if anybody gets unhorsed. It's our only chance. Get out of the way," he cried, flourishing his cocked rifle above his head with one hand while he guided me with the other. "Get out of the way or we will run you down. If we strike you, you are dead men."

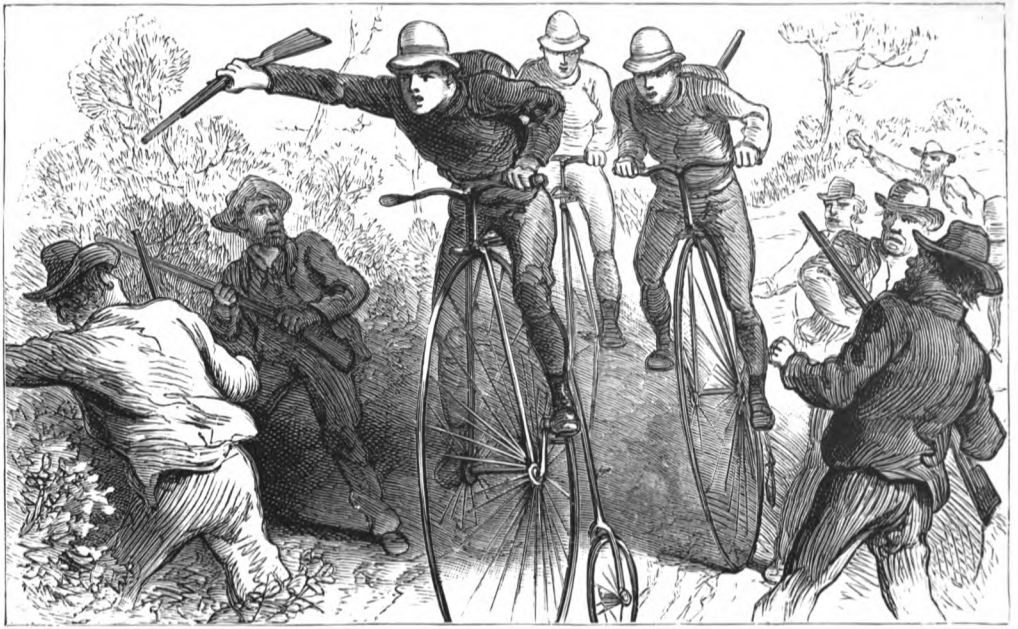
It never occurred to Matt and Dave to ask each other what would become of the boys themselves if their headlong progress were suddenly stopped, and neither did they linger to try the experiment. The three Columbias fairly whistled through the air; and when Matt saw that his peremptory orders to halt were disregarded, and that we were charging down upon him with apparently irresistible force, he scuttled out of the way with the greatest haste, and Dave Daily, the terrible man who hid in the woods and shot at officers unawares, was not an inch behind him.

"Look out for them pop-guns," he yelled.

"Yes, look out for them," shouted Arthur. "They're death on all sorts of varmints."

In less time than it takes to tell it the danger was over. Moving abreast and going at almost railroad speed we flew down the hill, and the way was clear. I caught just one glimpse of Matt Coyle's scowling and astonished face as we sped by, and that was the first and last time I ever saw him. After that I did not wonder that my master and his friends were resolved to fight to the death and take any risks rather than fall into his power, for if I ever saw an evil face I saw it then. But the man who carried it around with him was a coward, and so was the leader of the Buster band, who was afraid of the pocket rifles. If those handy little weapons had brought their owners into difficulty, they had also assisted in getting them out of it.

Being afraid to apply the brakes the boys regulated their speed with the pedals as well as they could, and when the foot of the hill was reached they stopped and looked behind them. There was no one in sight.



THE RUN FOR SAFETY.

"That was another tight squeak," said Roy, holding fast to his wheel with one hand and fanning himself with the other, as he always did when a halt was made, "and nothing but Matt's ignorance and Dave's brought us through. Well, I don't know that we are to blame if they didn't have sense enough to throw something in the road in front of us."

The excitement for that day was all over now, and I was very glad of it. The road being good and the coasting places frequent, we bowled along at a lively pace, and at four o'clock in the afternoon rode into the village of Ogden, where we halted for the night. One of the loungers on the porch was reading aloud from a weekly paper which had but just arrived with news that was no news to city people by this time. Of course the work of the train-wreckers was given a prominent place, as well as a lengthy notice. As I leaned against the porch and listened, I asked myself what those loungers would have said if some one had told them that the three dusty boys who had just disappeared through the door-

way were the ones who brought the efforts of the train-wreckers to naught. Roy and Arthur respected Joe's wishes, and never, in any one's hearing, spoke of what he had done that night.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

FROM the morning Joe Wayring and his friends left Ogden up to the time they wheeled over the old familiar road that led into Mount Airy, not a single thing happened to mar the pleasure of their trip. I do not mean to say that the roads were always good, or that they were never weather-bound; for those petty annoyances fall to the lot of every tourist, he expects them, and knows how to make the best of them. But they found no more train-wreckers along the route, nor were there any Buster bands or Matt Coyles to be afraid of. They spent many a night in camp; their pocket rifles brought them all the young squirrels they cared to eat; they encountered tramps on nearly every mile of the way, and although they never had the least trouble with these social outcasts, they listened to a story from the lips of two of them that interested

them exceedingly, and proved to Roy Sheldon's entire satisfaction that the clear-sighted Joe Wayring had hit pretty close to the mark when he declared that Roy's presence aboard the White Squall had not been brought about by accident.

Their destination was Plymouth, a little seaport town situated on a bay of the same name. They spent a day roaming about the wharves, looking at everything there was to be seen, especially the ships, which would hardly have attracted more than a passing notice from them, had it not been for Roy's experience in New London harbor. They went aboard of one, looked all over it, marveled at its strength and more at the power of the winds and waves which could so easily make a wreck of man's best handiwork. They turned up their noses at the dingy forecastle, smelling of tar and bilgewater, and wondered how any one could bring himself to bunk in it during a long voyage.

"I would much rather sleep on a bed of hemlock boughs," said Joe, "and go out in the morning and catch my own breakfast from the

sparkling waters of a lake or brook, and serve it up on a piece of clean bark. If I had been in love with the sea when I came here, I would be all over it now."

"It's rough, isn't it?" said Roy, as he and his companions went down the gangplank to the wharf; and he trembled all over when he thought how near he had come to being carried to distant countries against his will. "The little I saw of a sailor's life while I was on the White Squall convinced me that the officers are more to be dreaded than the forecastle. They can be as brutal as they please when they are out of sight of land, and there's no law to touch them."

"There's law enough," answered Joe, "but the trouble is, a sailor man can't use it. Suppose he has the officers of his vessel arrested for cruelty while he has the rest of the crew at hand to prove it against them. They are put under bonds, but the case is postponed on one pretext or another, and while that is being done, how is Jack going to live? Of course the minute he gets ashore he makes haste to spend his wages, and when his last dollar is

gone what recourse has he but to ship for another voyage? Then the case is called, and there being no one to prosecute, the captain and his mates are discharged and go aboard their vessel to play the same game over again."

"That's about the way those lightship men put it when I threatened to have Captain Jack punished for kidnapping me," said Roy. "That may be law, but it isn't justice. I wonder where the White Squall and Tony and Bob are now."

"I shouldn't think you would care," replied Arthur. "I know I shouldn't if I had been treated as you have."

"I don't much care what becomes of the ship and her officers, but I am sorry for the crew. I tell you that Tony and Bob were shanghaied the same as I was."

Becoming weary of Plymouth and its surroundings at last, the boys took the road again, this time with their faces turned toward Mount Airy. They went back by a different route, as they intended to do when they set out; but they had another reason for it now. Money

would not have hired them to return across the mountains and take their chances of capture by Matt Coyle and the Buster band. Now that they could think over their adventures with calmness, they were surprised at the ease with which they had slipped through those ruffians' fingers. They knew they couldn't do it again, and they would have gone home by rail rather than try the mountain route a second time. There was one thing about it, Arthur repeatedly declared: The man who wrote their guide-book must be posted so that he could warn wheelmen to keep away from Glen's Falls until the mischief-making squatter and his new allies had been arrested and lodged in jail.

On the afternoon of the second day after leaving Plymouth, the boys came suddenly upon a couple of tramps who had halted under the shade of a tree by the roadside to eat the bread and meat they had begged at the nearest farmhouse. But these men were not like the other tramps they had seen. They were sailors on the face of them, and looked out of place there in the country so far from salt water. Roy Sheldon was sure there was something

familiar about them, and hardly knowing why he did so, he called out, as he moved past them, "Bob, Tony," whereupon the men jumped to their feet and stared hard at him without saying a word. They were evidently frightened, and would have taken to their heels if they had seen the least chance for escape.

"I declare, I believe they are Tony and Bob," said Roy, who was utterly amazed at the effect his words had produced upon the tramps; and turning about, he rode back to the tree under which they stood. "How in the name of all that's wonderful did you get stranded here?"

"Is—is it Rowe Shelly?" one of the men managed to ask.

"Yes, sir, they are Tony and Bob," exclaimed Roy, getting off his wheel and nodding at his companions. "Dusty as they are, I know them. What's the matter?" he added, as the men began backing away as if they did not want him to come any nearer. "You are not afraid of me, are you? I am not a ghost, and neither am I Rowe Shelly, although my name sounds somewhat like his, and I have

been told that I look like him. I am a different boy altogether. Now let's have the straight of this thing before we go any farther. I saw you carried to sea on the White Squall. How did you escape from her, and where is she now?"

"At the bottom of the ocean," replied one of the men; and the boys thought from the way he spoke he was glad to be able to say it.

"At the bottom of—" began Roy, incredulously. "Serves her just right. She had no business to—but everything goes to show that you took me aboard of her on purpose to have me kidnapped. What have you to say about it? Sit down and eat your dinner. You can talk just as well, and you act as though you were very hungry."

"So we are, sir," said the one whom Roy had picked out, and who he afterward addressed as Tony. "We never done such a thing before, sir, but we had to come to it. It's no use trying to hide the truth any longer, for it has come out on us. Yes, sir; me and Bob did take you aboard that ship on purpose."

"There, now," cried Joe, indignantly, while Arthur Hastings looked and acted as though he wanted to fight.

"But what object did you have in doing it?" continued Roy. "Who put you up to it—Willis?"

"He's the very chap, sir: but we've been punished for it, and we hope—"

"You've nothing whatever to fear from me, if that is what you want to say," interposed Roy, who was impatient to get at the bottom of what was to him a deep mystery. "You know how I got away, and here I am, safe and sound. Your actions proved that you did not think you were going to be shanghaied yourselves—what are you looking for?"

"You're right we didn't know it, sir," answered Tony, who pulled out his ditty-bag, and after a little fumbling in it drew forth a piece of soiled paper which he handed to Roy. "That, sir, is the letter I took to Cap'n Jack that night. If I had only known what was writ onto it, me and Bob would have kept clear of that ship, you may be sare. The cap'n dropped it on deck shortly after you went

overboard, and I made bold to pick it up without saying a word to him about it. I thought it would come handy some day. Read it for yourself, sir, and you will see that me and Bob was innocent of any intention of doing the least harm to you, sir."

"Didn't you know that I was going to be kidnapped?" exclaimed Roy, almost fiercely. "You did. Everything goes to prove it; but you thought you could get me into trouble and slip off the ship without getting into trouble yourselves."

"Not a bit of it, sir," said Tony, with so much earnestness that Roy was almost ready to believe him. "Read that paper, and then I will tell you just what was said and done in my house on the beach while you was fast asleep upstairs."

The letter, which bore neither date nor signature, ran as follows:

"CAPTAIN JACK ROWAN:—Knowing that you have been delayed nearly three weeks waiting for a crew, I send you three men who, I think, will be of use to you. Two of them used to be sailors, but the other is green and will have to be broken in. Ask no questions, but take them along. A FRIEND."

Roy Sheldon was so surprised that he could not speak again immediately. He leaned his wheel against the tree, looked first at Tony and then at his friends, and finally sat down on a convenient bowlder.

"Seems to me that there letter clears me and Bob of everything except taking you aboard the White Squall when we didn't want to do it," said Tony, after a pause. "We was as innocent as babbies of what happened afterwards."

"If you didn't want to do it what made you?" demanded Joe.

This brought Tony to the story he had to tell; and as I believe I can make it clearer to you than he did to Joe and his friends, I will tell it in my own language.

Rowe Shelly's guardian, who was fond of the water, kept a swift sailing-vessel as well as a steam yacht, and Tony and Bob Bradley belonged to it. The colonel furnished them a house, gave them regular employment during the yachting season, and in the winter time permitted them to make what money they could by shooting water-fowl at the lower end of the

island for the New London markets. They knew nothing whatever of the colonel's private affairs. They had heard a good many rumors.

"I want to say a word right there," interrupted Roy. "Where did those rumors come from?"

The boys had seated themselves on the ground on each side of the sailors, who ate their dinner as they talked. Tony acted as spokesman, but his brother jogged his memory with a word now and then. The former could not say where the rumors came from, but the mischief was all done by an old sailor, who settled on one of the uninhabited islands in the harbor and went to fishing for a livelihood. Rowe Shelly chanced to run athwart his hawse one day while sailing about in his boat. He talked with the old fellow for more than two hours, and when he came home he exploded a bomb-shell in his guardian's ear. In other words, he told the colonel that there was no relationship between them; that he had no business with the money he was squandering; that his father had not been lost at sea, as the colonel affirmed; that he was still alive, and

so was his mother; that they lived in Chelsea, Maryland; and that he was going to them as soon as he could get off the island.

"I know that was a sassy way for him to talk to the man who had always been so good to him, seeing that he hadn't no better evidence than an old sailor-man's unsupported word to back him up," said Tony, "but the way the colonel acted satisfied Rowe at onct that there was more'n a grain of truth in what he had heard. The first thing he done was to take away the boy's boat, and shut him up on the island as close as if it had been a jail, and his second, to get rid of the fisherman. How he done it nobody seems to know; but he wasn't never seen again, nuther by Rowe Shelly nor nobody else. But the mischief had been done, and the first thing we knowed, Rowe Shelly couldn't be found. How he got off the island nobody couldn't tell, but he and his bisickle was gone. They was gone for more'n two weeks; but Willis, who acts like he was as big a man on the island as the colonel himself, follered him up and ketched him with the help of detectives."

"How did this fisherman happen to know so much about Rowe's father and mother?" inquired Arthur.

"He was shipmates with 'em; lived next door to them in some town down South," replied Tony. "He knowed the little boy, Rowe Shelly, and used to trot him on his knee and tell him stories of furrin parts, and he knowed well enough that there was some sort o' hocus-pocus about it, or the colonel wouldn't never had that money the old grandfather left. You see it sorter hurt the old feller when Cap'n Shelly, who was his only child, married a widder with a growed-up son against his will, and it hurt him, too, to have the cap'n keep on going to sea when he didn't want him to; and so he said that the cap'n shouldn't never have a red cent of his money. But when Grandfather Shelly found that he'd got to pass in his checks, and that the dark river was waiting for him, he gives in and willed all the money to the cap'n, provided he would settle down on shore."

When this happened, as you have already heard, Captain Shelly was at sea. His ship,

the Mary Ann Tolliver, was lost, and as nothing was heard from him or any of the crew everybody supposed that all hands had been lost with her. This was the opportunity for the rascally step-son, and straightway he was up and doing. With his mother's full and free consent he was appointed Rowe's guardian and administrator of the property that had fallen to him, and then he was in clover. Finding that the boy's mother was in his way, and that she was strenuously opposed to any squandering of Rowe's money, he proceeded to rid himself of her presence. He did not exactly turn her out of doors, as Rowe thought he did, but he *lost* her—sent her away on a visit, and when she returned he wasn't to be found. He and Rowe were in Europe, and there they stayed until the guardian thought she had had ample time to die or forget him. Then he came back, bought an island in New London harbor, so that he could not readily be intruded upon and Rowe could not easily slip out of his grasp if he wanted to, and set himself up for a gentleman of wealth and leisure.

In the mean time Captain Shelly and some

of his men, who had been picked up and carried to some distant port, returned, and the captain and his wife were reunited; but the former, being broken in health and spirits and ruined financially (every dollar he owned in the world went down with his ship), did not and could not make any very persevering effort to find out what had become of his scapegrace stepson and the little boy who was worse than orphaned. After a year or two spent in useless search he gave them up for lost; but others interested themselves in the matter, not for the purpose of aiding in restoring Captain Shelly to his rights, but simply to benefit their own pockets, and two of them, who succeeded in learning enough to keep Rowe's guardian in constant fear of exposure, were Willis and his son, Benny, who were given a home and paying situations on the island.

"If that isn't the biggest piece of villainy I ever heard of I wouldn't say so," exclaimed Joe, his face flushing with honest indignation. "Did yon ever talk to Rowe Shelly about these things?"

"Who? Me?" cried Tony, in surprise.

"Not by a great sight, sir. If I had, I would have been bundled off that there island so quick that I couldn't have told what my name was. I had a good home, and didn't want to lose it by meddling in things that didn't concern me."

"Well, your story agrees with the one Rowe told us on the night our friend was kidnapped and taken to the island, and I, for one, am inclined to believe it."

"I give it to you, sir, just as I got it," answered Tony. "You asked what them rumors was that we heard, and I have told you. If there wasn't no truth in 'em, what made the colonel act as he did—take the boy's boat away from him and keep him close about home, with orders to all of us from Willis to watch out for him?"

"That also confirms Rowe's story," said Arthur. "You know he told us he thought every one on the island was hired to keep an eye on him. We are all satisfied so far," he continued, turning to the old sailor. "Now, go ahead and tell us how you came to take Roy Sheldon over to that ship when you didn't want to?"

"Me and Bob never served aboard that ship till we was shanghaied on her," answered Tony, "but we had heard enough about her to make our hair stand on end. She was so rotten in some places that you could jab a knife into her timbers the whole length of the blade, and the companies wouldn't put a cent of insurance on her, and nobody but such reckless men as Cap'n Jack and his mates would sail on her. They got good pay for doing it, and for shipping crews against their will and holding a still tongue about the vessel's condition. But she's gone now," said Tony, rubbing his horny hands together almost gleefully, "and nobody will ever be fooled with her again. She sprung a leak in less'n half a gale 'bout two hunderd miles off the Cape, and went down like a log spite of all we could do at the pumps. We kept her afloat for seventy-two hours, and just as we were nigh going down, the brig Sarah West took us off and brung us into Plymouth."

"Where are you going now?" asked Roy.

"Back to the island where our families is," replied Tony. "We ain't got no place else to

go, but we ain't going to stay there. We'll take our dunnage and go somewheres else, for fear that the island may sink into the harbor with such men aboard of it. We dassent stay there no longer. If Rowe has got safe off, knowing what he does, he'll kick up a row there, and if they'll let me into court, I'd just like to shove this paper at the judge and ask him will he take a squint at it, if he wants to see what sort of a landshark that man Willis is. We are powerful glad to see you again," he added, extending his hand to Roy, who shook it cordially, "and to know you didn't come to no harm all along of our taking you aboard the White Squall."

After this Tony went on with his story, to which, in order to make it plain to you, I will add a few things that he did not know. They came out months afterward, but this is the place to speak of them.

Although the housekeeper and all the people who were on the jetty when the yacht arrived were willing to believe that Roy Sheldon was really Rowe Shelly, Willis himself was perfectly well satisfied that he and Babcock had

made the biggest kind of a blunder. The question was: How should he get out of his difficulty? Willis looked everywhere for Benny, who was his right-hand man in all emergencies; but that worthy had gone over to the city that afternoon, and would probably return on a hired tug some time in the morning. You will remember that while Mrs. Moffatt was talking to Roy, and urging him to let her send up a lunch to that he might have a bite handy in case he became hungry before morning, the superintendent paced the room lost in thought. As he looked at the matter, it was absolutely necessary that Roy should be got rid of before daylight, and so effectually that no trace of him could be discovered. The superintendent's first thought was to drug him, put him into a boat, and shove him out into the harbor in time for the storm, which was already muttering in the distance, to blow him to sea. But that would involve too many risks of a rescue, and Willis at last decided to hold to his original plan and "take Tony into his confidence."

When he went downstairs with Mrs. Moffatt

he left the house and hurried to Tony's cabin on the beach.

"The minute he come into the door I knew there was something the matter of him," said the sailor, "for I had never seen him look so queer and wild before; but how he ever made out to pull the wool over my eyes and Bob's as he done by the ridikilis tale he told us, is something I can't now get through my head. Nuther can Bob, and we've talked about it a hunderd times or more. Seems now that we'd oughter known it wasn't so, but we didn't. 'Boys,' says he, mighty soft and palavering like, but all the while acting as though there wasn't nothing wrong, 'I want you to do something for me. Two weeks ago Cap'n Jack Rowan of the White Squall borrered five hundred dollars of the old man (that was Colonel Shelly, you know), and the old man told me to be sure and get it of him before he sailed. While I was in the city I got a letter from the cap'n stating that if I would send for the money to-night, I could have it; so I want you and Bob to take Rowe and go and get it. I'll give him an order for it. Be lively, for

there'll be a gale on in an hour or so.' That was what Willis said to me and Bob; and although we didn't much like the idee of going aboard the White Squall, knowing what sort of a chap Cap'n Jack was, we told him we'd go, like a couple of fools. 'All right,' says he. 'You get the boat ready, and I'll go and tell Rowe to hurry up. But mind, you mustn't say one word to him where you're going. If you do, he'll stay ashore and I won't get that money.' And then what does that old scamp do," exclaimed Tony, with rising indignation, "but run up to the house and write this here letter to Cap'n Jack, telling him that here was three men for him, and he'd best take us along without asking no questions."

"Then he came into the room where I was and told me a funny story, too," said Roy, who was listening with all his ears. "I should like to know who came in with him, and what the pair of them would have done if I had not awakened just as I did."

"I guess it was Benny," said Bob; and he guessed right. "Them two is both tarred with the same stick."

Benny was ashore, as I told you, and by the merest chance met the detective Babcock, who made a clean breast of the whole business; whereupon Benny hired a tug, and started for home. By the time he got there he was as frightened as was his father, whom he met setting out for Tony's house.

"You needn't waste words with me," said the dutiful son, the minute he saw that his sire was about to begin a lengthy explanation. "I saw Bab, and he told me all about it. You are a pretty pair, I must say. Who is this chap who looks so much like Rowe, and what are you going to do with him?"

"His name is Roy Sheldon, and he is a Mount Airy wheelman," replied Willis. "I am going to send him to sea on the White Squall."

"The very plan I had in my own head," saie Benny, approvingly. "Who's going to take him there?"

"I thought of asking Tony and Bob. I'll offer—"

"Don't offer them a cent," interrupted Benny. "Tell them to go and get five hun-

dred dollars that Cap'n Jack borrowed of the old man, and send this wheelman along as Rowe Shelly, to get it. Understand?"

No; the superintendent did not quite grasp his son's meaning, and he was afraid Roy might not be willing to personate Rowe Shelly. It took Benny a long time to explain, but he succeeded at last, and then he asked his father if there was not some way in which he could get a glimpse of Roy so that he could satisfy himself that a mistake had been made. This was the way he came to be introduced into the presence of the young wheelman, who was fast asleep. The moment Benny's eyes rested upon the boy's face he knew he had never seen him before.

"You've done it as sure as the world," said he, in a savage whisper. "Get rid of him. Send him to the White Squall, and have Tony and Bob shanghaied at the same time, or they will get you into deeper trouble. Wake him up, tell him you have found out who he is, and say that you're going to send him back to his friends. In that way you can get him off without any fuss, and—"

Just then Roy stirred in his sleep, and Benny took to his heels, barely having time to close the door behind him before the boy was wide-awake.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"BENNY is old man Willis's son," Tony hastened to explain. "If you was to shake 'em both up in a hat, it is hard to tell which one of 'em would come out first for meanness. That's our story, sir. You know what happened after we got aboard the White Squall."

"What did Willis mean when he called you off on one side saying that he had an order for you?" inquired Roy. "Did he want me to believe that he was about to send you to the city for goods?"

"I don't know what he meant you should believe; he jest wanted to give me a few parting instructions. He said you didn't much like the idee of going out in that wind, and that if you raised a fuss about it after we got started, we must quiet you by saying that we dassent turn around for fear of of a capsize.

He said, furder, that we mustn't talk to you more'n we could help, for you'd kick if you found you was going aboard the White Squall. He said you had the order for the money in your pocket, and what was writ on the paper he give me was meant to hurry Cap'n Jack up, so't we could get back to the island before the wind riz any higher. But t'wasn't no such thing," continued Tony, wrathfully. "It told Cap'n Jack to take us to sea and say nothing about it."

"And were you stupid enough to believe that our friend Roy was Rowe Shelly? You stood within arm's-length of him, and it looks to me as if you ought to have seen at a glance that it wasn't any one you knew," said Arthur, forgetting that he had once stood within less than arm's-length of Rowe Shelly, and never suspected that he wasn't Roy Sheldon until he had come pretty near being thrown on his head.

"We never knew the difference," said Tony, earnestly, "for the reason that we didn't know there was anything wrong. We knew Rowe had run away, and as me and Bob supposed

that he had been ketched and brung back, like he was before, we didn't ask no questions. Of course we thought it was Rowe that we were going to take off to the ship after that money, and why should we not? How could we tell one from t'other when the night was so dark, and they were both dressed alike and the wind blowed so loud that we couldn't recognize his voice?"

"What did you think when you saw him jump into the harbor?" inquired Joe.

"Well, sir, we was scared to death, and there isn't no manner of sense in saying we wasn't. We wouldn't never dared to show our faces in New London again if I hadn't found this letter, 'cause we'd been afraid that we might be tooken up for trying to make way with Rowe, though Lord knows we wouldn't a raised a finger against him. What's writ onto this here paper will clear us, won't it, sir?"

"I think it will; but if you need any more evidence, drop a line to me. I will give you my address," said Roy. "What made you back away from me when I got off my wheel

and walked toward you? Did you think I was a ghost?"

"I ain't quite sure that there is such things as ghosts in the world," replied Tony, "though in my time I've talked to more'n one who has seen 'em; but wouldn't you feel kinder oneasy under them circumstances? We took you aboard the ship a purpose, like we told you, but we didn't do it to get you used like you was."

"Then you knew that ship was the White Squall, and that she was not going into the harbor for shelter?" said Joe.

"Course we did, sir. What would any craft want to run from a fair sailing wind like that for? We knew she was going to sea, and was in a hurry to get you aboard so't you could get the money we thought you wanted. We thought it kinder queer 'cause you didn't give the cap'n the order when I give him the letter, but we didn't mistrust anything till we seen you go overboard. Of course we knew before that, that we had all been shanghaied; but what I mean is, that we never mistrusted till then that mebbe you wasn't Rowe Shelly.

We didn't think he'd have the pluck to jump overboard, for he isn't much of a boy for going a swimming. When we was running into Plymouth some of them Bethel fellers flung a lot of papers aboard of us, and me and Bob happened to get hold of one that told us all about it, only it didn't say anything about Rowe Shelly. Ain't your name Peter Smith?"

"Not much," replied Roy, with a laugh. "But I am the fellow who jumped overboard, all the same. Now, what induced you two to tramp back to New London instead of shipping on some vessel that would take you there?"

"There are two reasons for it," answered Tony. "In the first place, there wasn't no ship in port that was going where we wanted to go; and in the next, we've had enough of the water and thought we'd like to stay on shore for a spell. You see, we ain't by no means as young as we used to be, and can't stand the hard knocks as well. We never got a blow after we was drove for'ard that night, 'cause we know what a sailor man's duty is and we done it; but them was a rough lot of

officers, I tell you. Do you know where Rowe Shelly is now?"

"I am sorry to say we don't," replied Arthur. "We hoped to hear from him before this time, but if he has written us, the letter hasn't caught up with us. But we can tell you one thing: when you get back to the island you'll not find matters as they were when you left. My two friends here saw Rowe, mistook him for me just as Willis and Babcock mistook me for Rowe, had a long talk with him, and put some ideas into his head. Colonel Shelly will have to give up Rowe's money and get out of that—you'll see; and if Captain Shelly is still alive, he will come to that island and take possession."

Joe Wayring and his friends spent the best part of the afternoon in Tony's company and Bob's, and did not take leave of them until they had learned as much of Rowe Shelly's history as the men were able to tell them. They also asked after Captain Jack; but that worthy and his mates had disappeared the moment the Sarah West had reached the wharf at Plymouth, and Tony could not say where they

were. No doubt they had gone to New London on the cars, while the foremast hands, having no money at their command, had to ship again as soon as they could, or turn tramps for a season as Tony and Bob had done. Roy gave them his address, advised them to use all the means in their power to open communication with Rowe when they reached the city, and stand by to aid him in getting his rights; and then he and his friends shared their small stock of money with them, and once more turned their faces toward Mount Airy."

"Didn't I tell you that you were taken aboard the White Squall on purpose?" said Joe, as they shot around the first bend in the road and left the sailors out of sight. "I guess you are willing to believe it now."

"And I think you are equally willing to believe that I was right when I said that Tony and Bob were shanghaied the same as I was," retorted Roy. "That man Willis is a schemer from way back. I shall always think that the easiest way for him to get out of his difficulty would have been to send me ashore, as I thought he was going to do. I never would

have made him trouble, for up to the time I was sent aboard that ship I was treated as well as I wanted to be."

"I think Willis was afraid he would lose his situation if he told the colonel that he had made a mistake, captured the wrong boy, and given Rowe a chance to get away," said Arthur.

"I don't see why he should be, for if I understand the situation, his employer would not dare discharge him," continued Roy. "For some reason or other Willis made up his mind that the only thing he could do was to get rid of me; he was afraid to hire Tony and Bob to take me aboard that ship and leave me there, for that would give them a hold upon him; so he thought the best way was to get rid of the whole of us in a lump. I will say this much for Willis: he came pretty near doing it. I felt tolerable mad at Tony and Bob when you fellows suggested that they had been hired to have me kidnapped, and here I've gone and divided my last dollar with them."

"And we felt just as angry at Rowe for getting you into a scrape, and yet we are ready to

stand by him," said Joe. "On the whole, I am satisfied with what we have done on this trip."

I thought he had reason to be. There was no one along the route who knew what Joe had done to avert that railroad disaster, but the folks at home had been posted before this time. On the day they left Plymouth Arthur and Roy mailed the full details of Joe's "Wild Ride," but the latter knew nothing of it until a week had passed, and they stopped for the night at a railway station where they found their trunks and a package of mail waiting for them. When Joe glanced at his mother's letter beginning: "My dear boy, how could you do it? I am frightened every time I think of it," and the first line of Uncle Joe's, which ran: "I am proud of my brave namesake. You have covered yourself with glory enough for one summer, and had better come home and relieve your mother's anxiety," he knew just what had been going on, and congratulated himself on having escaped return orders until his face was toward Mount Airy. All he said to his friends was:

"You fellows spread ink a trifle too freely while we were in Plymouth. If I had suspected it, I would have dropped the pair of you over the end of the pier like a couple of kittens."

"Perhaps that wouldn't have been so easy, either," replied Arthur. "More than twenty days' steady wheeling has brought us a tolerable muscle, I want you to remember. But what's the odds? It was bound to come out, and Roy and I kept still about it until we were homeward bound. When you write all you've got to do is to tell Uncle Joe we're coming."

Joe wrote that very night, and his letter contained a complete history of Roy's doings in New London harbor, and told how Arthur had come near getting them into serious trouble by shooting Matt Coyle's watch-dogs. He omitted nothing, and when he finished, he flattered himself that he had described the thing in language so graphic that Roy and Arthur would be invited to expedite their return.

The next time they came up with their letters, they also found papers containing some

surprising as well as gratifying intelligence. Every man in the Buster band, including Matt Coyle and his gang of train-wreckers, had been arrested and put under lock and key. Acting upon the advice given him by the young wheelmen, Mr. Holmes had gone to New London and identified his property; that is, the implements that had been used to force that big rock from its bed and roll it upon the track. It was by his suggestion (which in the first place came from one of our three friends, as you will remember) that a couple of officers, disguised as tramp hunters, came to Glen's Falls and proceeded to "spot" every man they wanted. More strange tramps came in at intervals, and when the officers, for that was what they really were, were nearly equal in number to the law-breakers, they "corralled the whole business and ran them in." To quote from Roy Sheldon, who was so highly excited that he wanted to yell, it was a "pretty slick scheme," and by the time Matt was through serving the sentence that would surely be passed upon him, they would no longer stand in any fear of him, for they

would be big enough to punch his head if he didn't let them alone.

"But I am really afraid our friend Bigden will see fun now," said Roy, in conclusion. "If Matt gets half a chance he will tell all he knows."

"I don't believe the things he did in the Indian Lake country will be brought against him," said Joe." "He'll come in for trying to wreck the train; and by the time he has been punished for that, he won't want to get into any more scrapes."

"And where will we come in? Look here, Bub," exclaimed Roy, shaking his finger at Joe. "When you took that unworthy revenge upon Art and me, and told your mother what we have done and suffered since we have been on the road, you told her that we laid in the bushes and heard all Matt and his fellow rascals had to say, didn't you? I thought as much. Well, *that* will be sure to come out, with all the rest of the things, and the last one of us will be *subpœnaed.* If any one of us spread ink too freely, you are the man."

"I didn't see Matt that night," protested

Joe, "for it was so dark I couldn't see anybody."

"No matter, you heard his voice. You will be called upon to tell how you knew it was his voice, and all that, and the first thing you know there'll be something wormed out of you that you don't mean to tell."

Joe Wayring did not like to think about that, but still he did not eat or sleep any the less for fear of it. He enjoyed the homeward run and so did his friends, for they had done what they set out to do, and more too. They stopped for one night at the Lafayette House, and spent the evening at the Academy of Music; but there was no detective waiting to take one of them by the arm when they came out, and neither did they meet any one who could give them any information concerning Rowe Shelly. They sent a despatch to their parents, telling where they were, and when they would be home, and the result was that about three miles out of Moun Airy they found a delegation of wheelmen waiting for them. Of course the drug-store crowd was not represented, but Tom Bigden and his cousins

were there. Joe thought he knew what Tom had come for, and was made sure of it when Tom ranged alongside of him, after a short halt had been made and the hand-shaking was over, and in a roundabout way began making inquiries concerning Matt Coyle. Joe was sorry he couldn't tell much about him, but he said enough to set Tom's fears at rest. He declared—not as if he thought Tom had the least interest in the matter, but merely as an item of news—that he would not prosecute Matt for stealing his canoe or tying him to a tree, because he would have enough to answer for when he was brought up for putting that rock on the railroad track. Joe was not revengeful, but he did want to see the squatter punished for that.

It is hardly necessary to add that Tom Bigden breathed easier after his talk with Joe, and when he left the latter at his gate and told him he was glad he and his friends had had an enjoyable run and come safely home, in spite of everybody and everything that had tried to hinder them, the words came from his heart. Tom had been on nettles ever since he read in

the papers that Matt was still alive, and in a fair way to be brought to justice, and although he felt relieved, he knew he would not sleep soundly until Matt's trial was over and prison doors had closed upon him.

"Six hundred and forty-two miles in thirty-five days," said Joe, when he had kissed his mother and shaken hands with every one who was on the back porch. "A little over eighteen miles a day. That wouldn't be anything to brag of if the roads had been good all the way; but when you take the mountains and long patches of sand into consideration—"

"And Matt Coyle and the train-wreckers," added Uncle Joe.

"They didn't delay us any to speak of," replied the young wheelman, "but that Roy Sheldon, with his black eyes and lame arm, did. Well, I'm glad to get back, and why don't you say you are glad to see me?"

Every one of them had said so more than once, for I had heard them, and besides, they showed it very plainly by their actions. Everybody in town was glad to see him, and he had so much visiting to do that for a time I was

entirely neglected. One morning I had a chance to say "hello!" to the Canvas Canoe and Fly-rod as they were carried across the porch and down the path that led to the lake, and when they returned at dark I exchanged a few words with them before they were taken upstairs. In as few words as possible I told them where I had been and what I had seen during my long absence, and in return Fly-rod told me that he had that day seen two old acquaintances; or as he expressed it, "the whole of one and a part of the other."

"In the show-case in which I stood before Joe Wayring bought me, were a couple of high-priced lads, a split-bamboo and a double-barrel shot-gun, who wouldn't say a civil word to me because I was worth only six dollars and a half," said Fly-rod, with a ring of triumph in his tones. "The gun was purchased by a dude who went into the woods because it was fashionable, and the bamboo became the property of one of the handsomest little girls you ever saw. Well, I saw that rod to-day lying flat in the mud, while his owner was paddling in the water with bare feet. He was rusted all

over where there was anything to rust, and you could see daylight between his ribs where they had been glued together. He was ashamed to speak to me, for he had boasted that he was going to Canada to do battle with the lordly salmon. A little while afterward we heard a booming up the lake and saw a commotion in a boat whose crew were engaged in shooting wood-ducks. The Canvas Canoe took us up there in a hurry, and we found that a gun had burst in the hands of one of the party—the very dude who bought that double-barrel shot-gun. There wasn't much left of the gun, nothing but the stock and locks, in fact, but I knew him. The dude wasn't hurt, for a wonder, but he was mad, and the minute he recovered from the fright into which he had been thrown, he grabbed the wreck of that gun and sent it as for as he could into the bushes. Here *I* am, sound as a dollar, thanks to the good treatment I have received, supple as ever and ready to catch another black bass any time I am called upon."

The next thing that interested me was hearing a letter from Rowe Shelly read on the

porch. He hadn't written before for the very good reason that he had nothing to say; and although he had plenty now, he had no time to say it, for he was going after his father and mother who were alive and well, but poor owing to ill health. He went into hiding, as Joe said he did, and found a lawyer to interest himself in his case; but although the latter went to work very quietly, Colonel Shelly and Willis and Benny had taken the alarm and cleared out. His parents had been advertised for and found, and Rowe was going to them by the first train. He would have more to tell them in his next letter, and wanted them, one and all, to get ready to visit him the minute he sent them word. He owed them everything he had, or was going to have, and they would see that he wasn't the boy to forget such things.

And neither did Roy Sheldon forget those men on the lightship. Of course they did nothing more than their duty when they pulled Roy out of the water and took care of him, but that did, not lessen the boy's gratitude nor his father's, either. Mr. Sheldon made it his busi-

ness to drop into a bank shortly after Roy came home, and when he left it those old sea dogs had a handsome sum of money to draw on, though they were advised to let it accumulate so that they would have something to fall back upon when they became too old to attend to the lightship.

Before I went into winter quarters I had the satisfaction of knowing that everything had turned out just as Joe Wayring and his friends wished. Rowe Shelly found his parents and easily established their identity, with his lawyer's help, and the rascally guardian, as well as those who aided him in keeping the boy out of his rights, were overhauled before they had left the city many miles behind; but they were not brought to trial. They simply surrendered their ill-gotten gains, Captain Shelly took quiet possession of his island home, and that was the end of the matter so far as they were concerned; but the gossips had something to talk about for weeks afterward. Joe Wayring and his friends were not needed when Matt Coyle was brought before the court in Bloomingdale, for those tramp detectives

had all the evidence they wanted to send him and his gang to prison. Then Tom Bigden felt safe, and I hope he has turned over a new leaf as he has often promised to do. Although every one in Mount Airy heard of the things that George Prime threw up to him, there were few who believed them, thanks to the way Joe and his chums stuck to him through thick and thin.

A few days ago Rowe Shelly wrote that he was ready and waiting for Joe and the "rest of his crowd," and the sooner they came to see him the better he would like it. They will accept the invitation for the coming holidays; and if I am any judge of boys' tastes they will find few topics of conversation that will be of more interest to them than the incidents I have attempted to describe in my story, and which happened during THE RAMBLES OF A BICYCLE.

THE END.